Women Workers Organising: Identity and Collective Action in Thailand and Indonesia

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Abstract

This thesis addresses specific questions in relation to the role of identity in women workers' collective organising in developing countries. How do gender and economic regimes shape the construction of women workers' collective identity? Through what strategies do union women manage competing identities in their efforts to mobilise women workers? How do they address the risks attached to claiming recognition as a group when this may validate essentialist notions of identity? What types of alliances are possible when the construction of group identity includes particular women and workers but excludes others? How do women workers balance struggles for recognition with struggles for redistribution within trade unions and in the labour market and economy more generally?

To begin to answer these questions, this thesis draws on new social movement theory to examine how union women are motivated by their experience of identity and in turn politicise this identity to mobilise and organise other women. It is also informed by feminist critical theory which draws attention to the ways in which some women utilise gender, class and other differences to argue for recognition of group specificity and for representation in political structures of decision-making. At the basis of this research is information gathered through in-depth interviews with women workers in a variety of workers' organisations in Thailand and Indonesia and secondary sources gathered during field work in these two countries.

In the context of struggles for recognition and redistribution, this thesis argues that many women workers want to be recognised as a distinct group with equal rights to participation and political voice. It suggests that whether they portray themselves and frame their issues as a distinct group of women or as a group of workers, depends largely on local and global gender and economic regimes.

This research adds to the existing literature on women workers' resistance to patriarchal control in the workplace by focusing on women workers' collective organising rather than individualistic strategies of resistance. It offers a detailed analysis of the processes of mobilisation and organisation, and suggests that many women workers consciously emphasise gender and/or class difference in these processes. This work contributes to

the literature on feminism and social movements by demonstrating the role of identity and the politics of difference in social movement organisations and their struggles

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Introduction

Women in trade unions

Why do women workers in developing countries mobilise and organise collectively in trade unions and other workers' organisations? What kinds of identity politics affect their joining? Answering these questions requires us to take a close look at trade unions as social movements, at women's role in gendered institutions, and at women's challenges to dominant or hegemonic identities as women, as workers, as mothers, as neighbours, and as religious followers. For women occupy many identities, some of which will generate social or political action. This thesis combines feminist critical theory with new social movement theory to examine the complexities of – and tensions between – individual and collective identities through which women workers mobilise and organise under diverse structures of labour regulation and labour control and in diverse cultural environments. Understanding the role of identity in social movements is vital for understanding the modalities of collective action among particular groups of women.

Trade unions are often portrayed in Western, conservative media as anachronistic and politicised organisations, and by feminists as organisations that defend the entrenched interests of white, male workers in formal employment. When it comes to the struggle for social justice and the eradication of poverty worldwide, observers in high-income countries would be forgiven for believing that trade unions had been replaced by the anti-globalisation movement, the environmental movement, and various grassroots organisations, both in developing and in developed countries. But such assumptions obscure the fact that trade unions in the often poverty-affected and poorly regulated economies of developing countries have not developed according to the same criteria and the same trajectory as they did in most advanced economies. Rather than becoming irrelevant institutions linked to old methods of production of the twentieth century, some trade unions have fought back to regain relevance and to sustain membership. They are slowly adopting the new instruments and strategies for workers' organising that globalised production methods and organisational features of many companies increasingly require.

Trade unions are not often associated with gender equality struggles. As gendered institutions, they have their own particular struggle with gender equality which is far from over and which in many places may just be starting. During the past decade, much has been written about the position and role of women in trade unions in high-income countries and women's challenges to sexual politics in such institutions and their activities (Ledwith and Colgan 2002; Briskin 1999; Franzway 2002; Pocock 1997a; Balser 1987; Fonow 1998; Beckwith 1998). In their attempts to stabilise falling membership rates and to accommodate the growing number of women workers, many trade unions have recognised women's struggles and campaigns for equal treatment and against discrimination as part of their agenda. By participating and contributing as members and as aspiring leaders, union women have continued to put pressure on their organisations to address women's grievances, both in the workplace and within trade union hierarchies.

In developing countries, these processes have also started to occur. Still little is known about how women challenge or conform to gender norms and values in trade unions in these countries, and how these norms and values interact with other identities based on which women mobilise and organise. This thesis investigates how union women construct, contest, and reproduce particular identities in their struggle for representation in unions and participation in industrial relations.

Women workers organising

At various points in history, a range of economic, political, cultural, and religious factors have impacted on the conditions under which women work and on their responses to these conditions. A growing body of feminist research has analysed the impact of labour control in the workplace and the gender division of labour on women workers' propensity to organise (Arifin 1988; Lee 1998; Martens and Mitter 1994; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994; Saptari 1995; Tilly 1981). Others have examined the impact of religious authorities (Mather 1988); women's double or triple roles and commitments (Franzway 2002); and the masculine bias in organisations and institutions (Goetz 1997; Hensman 1996 and 2002; Ledwith and Colgan 2002; Franzway 2002). Without doubt, many more observations can be made with regard to these factors and their interplay at particular geographic and historical intersections.

While building on this work, this thesis will question the role and importance of *gender identity relative to other identities* in women workers' efforts to mobilise and organise collectively. Feminists have extensively debated the difficulties involved in speaking about women as a group without generalising about all women and essentialising womanhood. How can we speak about women workers mobilising and organising as women and on the basis of gender identity while overcoming these difficulties of homogenising and universalising 'women' as a category? The work of Iris Young (1995) is helpful here to distinguish between gender as "seriality" or passive experience of gender constraints as opposed to gender as a source of relevant and common attributes that provide a meaningful identity for social movement activism. Where gender identity is (made) relevant in collective mobilising and organising – and this by no means occurs in all cases – it may either conform to or challenge hegemonic gender identities. The latter are constantly reformulated and reproduced through gender regimes, defined by Connell as "a pattern in gender arrangements ... of an institution" (2002:53). The gender regimes of organisations and institutions in society "are part of wider patterns which also endure over time" and which Connell terms "the gender order of a society" (2002:54). The term 'gender regime' is used in this thesis to call attention to the pervasive nature of gender norms and values and their reproduction through the discourses and practices of organisations and institutions. Among these organisations and institutions are trade unions, corporations, religious institutions, families, households, and educational institutions.

Gender regimes operate in conjunction with economic regimes that in Southeast Asia are now increasingly characterised by neo-liberal capitalist modes of production and labour control. Such regimes are, however, by no means all-encompassing and – in Thailand and Indonesia – bear strong traces of discourses of self-sufficiency, nationalism, and cooperative production. Gender and economic regimes in trade unions and in the workplace can variously encourage and constrain women workers' mobilisation and organisation in the workplace and in their communities. The gender order of society, in turn, shapes how women workers frame their demands and what resources and which supporters they seek to draw upon in their struggles. This is not to say that class position is not important for these women: they clearly face practical constraints related to their position as factory, office or home-based workers and they struggle with what it means to be a worker in their community and society. Yet, some women workers experience class as 'seriality' that is not acted upon in collective

movement. Perceptions of worker identity are also gendered, and subject to challenges by women workers, who aim to replace them with more gender equal definitions and meanings of worker/work.

This thesis argues that gender regimes, in conjunction with the above-mentioned political, economic, cultural, and religious factors, pose barriers to some women workers but motivate others to engage in not just individual action, but also collective action. Aside from personal background (which will not be discussed in detail in this thesis), motivation for collective action also stems from organisations providing incentives to potential and current members, framing demands in order to attract supporters, drawing on existing networks and connecting with other movements. Most of these actions, as they have been outlined in social movement theory, will also be gendered. They involve men and women differently and build on – or instead challenge – accepted ways of being and doing for men and women. As such, they are part of the gender order of society (Connell 2002:54).

Yet, women anywhere in the world are by no means passive recipients of this gender order or in equal measure affected by it. Instead, they help to shape and reproduce it, and at times contest and recreate it. Through their union membership or union activism, some women workers accept dominant gender regimes (that in most instances draw on patriarchy), while others contest these same gender regimes and the identities they construct. This raises the question about when and why women workers decide to mediate and challenge gender norms, especially in their efforts to mobilise and organise other women. When these women workers challenge what Franzway (2002) calls the 'sexual politics' of trade unions – that is, "the complex gender relationships of power as domination, resistance, alliances, and pleasures that are central to all social institutions" (Franzway 2002:2) – what different and sometimes conflicting identities do they bring to their collective action? How and why do they move from 'seriality' to becoming a group with collective attributes around a politicised identity? How does this shape their demands for redistribution or for recognition? To what extent do they challenge hegemonic identities created and sustained by institutions and organisations in society at large, and particularly by the state, their employers/managers, and their trade unions? This thesis draws on feminist critical theory and theories of new social movements to attempt to answer these questions.

Methodology: Thailand and Indonesia

Although workers around the world are increasingly facing similar employment relations and economic pressures, the political and economic context in which they contribute to their jobs and their organisations differs widely from one country to another and from one sector or company to another. The particular gender dimensions that each culture, religion, and history bring to this puzzle make the use of case studies a relevant and valuable method to investigate women's negotiation of identities in trade unions. This thesis offers case studies analysing women workers in Thailand and Indonesia, with the aim to draw out factors that influence and shape the individual and collective identities of women workers who mobilise and organise collectively.

Thailand and Indonesia represent two countries in Southeast Asia where women have found increasing employment opportunities during the past three decades. Such opportunities have arisen mostly in labour-intensive light manufacturing and service industries, but many women continue to work in or have shifted to home-based manufacturing work. Regardless of the employment relations under which these women work, much of their work is lowly paid and loosely regulated. In both countries, the existence of a steady stream of migrant women willing (but often forced) to work for low wages makes unionisation and workers' protest more difficult. Both countries also share some economic and political characteristics, such as their paths of economic development, their incorporation into the global economy, the low rate of business regulation by central and local governments, and restrictive labour legislation. Nevertheless, significant differences between the two countries can be found in their systems of industrial relations and their gender regimes. These similarities and differences are discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.

Questions about identity and social movement activism could be posed in relation to any capitalist economy in Southeast Asia. Yet, Thailand and Indonesia also provide good examples of the gradual emergence and growth of semi-autonomous women workers' organisations. The existence of the Women Workers' Unity Group in Bangkok and the Forum for Indonesian Women Union Leaders and Activists in Jakarta makes Thailand and Indonesia particularly relevant choices for case studies. Similar groups uniting women from trade unions have emerged elsewhere in Asia. In some cases, however, these groups are either of very recent origin and fledgling (Malaysia) or the incorporation of women into the formal labour force has been a recent development

compared with most of Southeast Asia (Bangladesh). Even though they have no contact with each other, the groups in Thailand and Indonesia are similar in size, organisational structure, membership, and stated aims. While affiliated with national trade union federations, these organisations conduct their own fund-raising activities and, for the most part, enjoy independence in decision-making over programmes and activities. As such, they provide a rich source of examples of strategies and activities developed by women workers.

The choice of countries is influenced also by my personal and professional links with both. My work on gender and employment for the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Bangkok between 1997 and 1999 afforded me valuable insights into relevant theoretical and policy issues through direct access to events, resources and government, business, and trade union leaders. Such access through the ILO and its counterparts also became available to me when I moved to Indonesia in mid-2002 where I have worked as an occasional consultant for the ILO office in Jakarta. However, this link with the ILO also proved problematic at times in both countries. In a show of strong political awareness, many women workers expressed criticism of the ILO's role in labour legislation formulation and regulation, and of the perceived lack of concrete action for women workers on the part of the organisation. Pointing out that I had voluntarily left my ILO job, was now only associated with the organisation on a casual basis, and in no way gave the organisation access to my interview transcripts, helped to ease the concerns of many of these women.

This thesis focuses on women working in the formal and semi-formal economy in urban areas of Thailand and Indonesia, and in particular those women who have become members and leaders of trade unions and other workers' organisations. While it focuses on collective forms of protest rather than individual ones, it does not exclude informal and spontaneous protest actions. But why not examine organising among migrant workers, sex workers, or other groups of marginalised women workers? In Southeast and East Asia, migrant workers have established their own associations in recent years, independently or in association with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). For example, Indonesian women domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore have united in local self-help and advocacy groups with transnational linkages. Sex workers in Thailand and Indonesia have also started to organise and act collectively, through groups like Empower. However, much has already been written in the past few years on

organising by women migrant and sex workers (e.g. Wee and Sim 2003; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998).

Moreover, some of the obstacles to and incentives for organising experienced by these groups are very specific to the nature of their work and their position as workers. In contrast, the experiences of women in formal workplaces are more easily compared across sectors and also refer to a much larger number of women workers. The urban focus of the research is the effective result of the relative scarcity of women union members and leaders in rural areas in Southeast Asia, with the exception of the plantation sector. But again, the plantation sector constitutes a special case from which it is not easy to generalise or even extract conclusions for women workers more broadly. Although some rural women workers' organisations have emerged, the existence of the two women workers' organisations in Thailand and Indonesia was a deciding factor in favour of focusing this research on urban, formal women workers.

Feminist and social movement literatures

This thesis draws on a combination of sources, primary among which are fieldwork interviews, government and official documentation, and secondary sources. Given the inter-disciplinary nature of the thesis, the secondary sources used in it are from a variety of disciplines. The thesis is situated in feminist critical theory and social movement theory. Within feminist critical theory, I draw on literature examining women workers' construction as cheap, flexible labour in the context of economic restructuring (e.g. Brodie 1994; Enloe 1990; Lim 1990; Marchand and Runyan 2000; Mies 1986; Mohanty 1997; Mills 1998; Ong 1991; Pearson 1998; Pearson and Theobald 1998; Saptari 1995; Ward 1990; Wolf 1992). These writings provide insights into women's experiences in and resistance to the global division of labour and globalisation. I also draw extensively on literature concerning women in social movements such as women's movements (e.g. Alvarez 1990; Alvarez et al. 2003; Basu 1996; Blackburn 2004; Ferree and Martin 1995; Kaplan 1997; Lind 1992 and 2000; Molyneux 1998; Ray and Korteweg 1999; Stienstra 1999 and 2000).

A third area of feminist literature on which this thesis builds is women in trade unions and in organisations in general (e.g. Balser 1987; Chhachhi and Pittin 1996; Cockburn 1994; Franzway 2002; Goetz 1997; Hensman 1996 and 2002; Ledwith and Colgan

2002; Pocock 1997a; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994). This literature details women's experiences in gendered institutions such as trade unions and their attempts to challenge the sexual politics of these institutions (Franzway 2002). Lastly, the field of women in politics has brought forth a large literature, of which writings on women and representation have been useful for this thesis (e.g. Jonasdottir 1988; Karam 1998; Phillips 1995 and 2003; Rai 2002a and 2002b). To structure my thinking about gender and gender relations – both theoretically and in relation to Third World women – around these four areas of feminist literature, this thesis draws on feminist critical writings, among others by Connell (2002), Mohanty (1997 and 2003), White (1999) and Young (1995), on the construction of women as a category and identity, and on differences between women.

Of the various theories on social movements, this thesis draws predominantly on those of new social movements (Castells 1997; Cohen and Rai 2000; Escobar 1992; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Melucci 1989). These theories have been applied to women's movements but whether labour movements can be called new social movements is disputed. This thesis also makes use of major works in the resource mobilisation tradition that has sought to explain the emergence and activities of traditional and contemporary social movements, though largely without attention to gender or women (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; Stryker, Owens and White 2000; Tarrow 1998). While the new social movement literature has focused on identity matters in social movements, the resource mobilisation tradition concerns itself mostly with 'down to earth' operational matters. Finally, the literature on labour in Thailand and Indonesia used in this thesis is largely situated in the political economy tradition (Brown 1997, 2001 and 2004; Frenkel 1993; Frenkel and Harrod 1995; Hadiz 1997, 2000, 2001 and 2002; Hewison 1997; Lambert 1997; Lawler and Chokechai 2000; Manning 1998).

In addition to this academic literature, the thesis also draws on articles from major daily newspapers in Thailand and Indonesia, as well as reports by NGOs, international organisations, and government agencies. These include the International Labour Organization, the World Bank, and NGOs such as the Asian Migrant Resource Center, the Committee of Asian Women, Friends of Women, and Oxfam. The detail on Indonesia observed in some chapters is a result of the greater availability of literature in English on women, women workers, and trade unions concerning Indonesia than Thailand.

Fieldwork methodology

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in Thailand (September 2001-January 2002, May 2002 and May 2003) and in Indonesia (most intensively October 2002-March 2003 but continuing thereafter). Prior to the start of the fieldwork, I obtained clearance from the Australian National University for my human ethics protocol. According to this protocol, each of those I interviewed was given the option to remain anonymous. Acknowledgement of names in subsequent chapters indicates that those interviewed consented to me using their names; in cases where anonymity was requested, the use of pseudonyms has been indicated in the footnotes.

I identify three main categories of women workers in manufacturing or white-collar work: those who have never been members of trade unions or other workers' groups because these do not exist or are not allowed to exist in or around their workplaces; those who are members but who are usually silent and do not join meetings, negotiations or other activities such as rallies and marches; and those who are leaders and activists and who are vocal in public gatherings. Due to the nature of my research, I will speak mainly about the third category. Most of those interviewed lived in major urban centres. Initially, I primarily interviewed active members of the two women workers' organisations mentioned above, but the circle gradually expanded to include their friends and colleagues, former members, women from other trade unions (who were not members of the women workers' organisations), and activists from support organisations. In Indonesia, I met with women workers, NGO activists, and academics in Jakarta and surrounding industrial areas (Bekasi, Tangerang, and Bogor), Yogjakarta, Surabaya, Semarang, and Medan. In Thailand, my field interviews were limited to Bangkok and surrounding industrial areas (Rangsit, Phrapradaeng, and Omnoi-Omyai). Almost all of those I interviewed were women, except for a handful of male academics and NGO activists.

Interviews were semi-structured and were conducted in person, with the exception of one telephone interview. In most cases, interviews took place in the union or NGO office (with varying degrees of privacy), though a few were conducted at workers' homes or in public places such as restaurants or hotel lobbies (sometimes to seek privacy from other union officers). I interviewed approximately 45 to 50 people in each

country, of whom the majority were women trade union members and leaders. Others interviewed included male union leaders, staff from labour-oriented NGOs and international organisations, researchers and academics, and journalists. These (usually informal) interviews lasted anywhere between one and four hours and were semi-structured, using the same list of questions for each interview (with minor modifications depending on the organisational background of the individual). In addition to these interviews, the research in this thesis is based on participant observation conducted over the course of the fieldwork periods. This included trade union planning meetings, annual conferences, education sessions, and informal get-togethers on the sidelines of formal proceedings.

Positionality

Living in Jakarta since September 2002 allowed me to form and maintain close contact with many of the women interviewed for this project. This has probably been an advantage for my research in the sense that it allowed me frequent access to informants as well as local written sources relevant to the project. On the other hand, it heightens the problematic nature of my position as a researcher. Rejecting modernist claims of the possibility of dispassionate, rational objectivity in research, many feminists have written about the importance of understanding the impact of positionality on research findings. This is no less important in my own case, as boundaries of gender, age, class, linguistics, religion and race were apparent at some point or another (and often simultaneously).

Without doubt, these differences between my informants and me played an important role in mediating the information that was exchanged. When asked to explain why I, as an educated, white, European, and seemingly rich woman, was interested in the lives and stories of disadvantaged, lowly educated Thai and Indonesian women, I would take the opportunity to explain my background and the origins of my interest. In most interviews, I volunteered such information so that the person interviewed felt more comfortable with my presence as well as to indicate my own willingness not only to ask but also to answer questions.

Some of my interviews with male unionists featured sexist jokes and sexual innuendo, based on my age and the fact that I was assumed to be unmarried. Not surprisingly, on

such occasions male unionists denied the existence of gender discrimination in their organisations. In other interviews, women union members doubted my ability to understand their hardships, as I was to them obviously from a different class. Some discussions that featured religion as a topic – especially Islam in Indonesia – were either shortened based on my informant's assumption that I as a Christian would not understand anyway, or extended excessively in the hope that I as a Christian could be made to understand some essential aspect of the person's religion. I tried as much as possible, given the limited time available for the interviews, to show empathy, display some knowledge of local issues and circumstances, and put people at ease with small talk and jokes. But notwithstanding these efforts, it is likely that the Indonesian and Thai women and men I spoke with tailored their answers to their understanding of what I wanted to hear or what I could understand or relate to.

Of these diverse barriers, the linguistic barrier deserves to be mentioned in greater detail. In Indonesia, all interviews were conducted in Indonesian, the national language of education for all informants. Only a handful of these interviews (five in total) were taped on audiocassette, each time with prior permission of the person interviewed. I decided to tape interviews if the person spoke unclearly or rapidly (to be able to check my understanding of the discussion afterwards); if the person was a vital member of the women workers' groups examined in this thesis; and/or if I expected the person to be familiar with formal interviews based on their exposure to the media and other researchers. Whether or not interviews were taped, I took detailed notes on each occasion, augmented by impressions and memories immediately afterwards.

In Thailand, on the other hand, all interviews (except those in which informants were not Thai or were comfortable speaking English) were conducted with the assistance of an interpreter who translated each question and answer. This interpreter had previously worked for a Bangkok-based labour-oriented NGO, and was therefore already acquainted with a few of the women union activists whom I wanted to interview. Taping all interviews (again, with prior permission) allowed us to check her translation afterwards, transcribe interviews, and make corrections to my interpretation where necessary. In addition, listening to the taped interviews gave me a chance to reflect on how the phrasing of my questions or the tone of my voice may have influenced the responses. Finally, listening to the tape recording made me realise that those

interviewed had, at times, made gentle fun of my inability to understand more than only basic Thai.

By virtue of living in Indonesia over a longer period of time, I had the chance to meet my informants periodically. In some cases, I initiated follow-up meetings to ask additional questions. In other cases, I received invitations from women workers to join their activities. Where I conducted participant observation, I had usually been invited as observer or resource person, though at times union women used my attendance to show participants that there was a foreigner who cared about their problems. Although I was thus able to gather more detailed and better longitudinal information about Indonesian women in trade unions, I was also often put in difficult positions. Not only did I find it hard to explain that my full-time writing imposed time constraints on attending women workers' gatherings, I also became more than a researcher to many of these women. Pleas for financial assistance (made by both individuals and groups), requests for technical advice (on anything from union negotiations with employers to gender mainstreaming), and invitations to social gatherings clearly changed my position from that of outsider to potential resource and discussion partner. While this undeniably influenced these women's views of me, it also meant that I could ask more probing questions where relevant to the research. In the chapters describing fieldwork findings, I have indicated where I believe my own position as researcher or as friend may particularly have influenced the responses provided.

Terms and definitions: a "conceptual map"

Terms such as 'trade unions', 'worker' and 'gender equality' have over the course of many years become invested with particular meanings. This thesis analyses particular ways in which women workers have contested these terms and have attempted to assign to them new or expanded meanings. It is therefore important to indicate briefly at the start how these and other important terms will be used in this thesis. A more detailed debate and an exploration of relevant literature will be pursued in subsequent chapters.

Trade union

Historically, the term 'trade union' referred to the organisations established by factory or office workers to defend their interests through collective bargaining. 'Freedom of association' as set out in relevant International Labour Conventions refers to the right of

workers to set up through free and democratic means officially registered organisations that can represent workers in negotiations with employers. In this thesis, 'trade union' will refer to such organisations with official registration and with membership consisting of formally employed workers. However, in recent years, the continuing flexibilisation of work has made many workers ineligible to join or establish trade unions. Increased international recognition of home-based work and domestic work as forms of employment have made women working under such arrangements increasingly aware of the need to organise and the possibilities for doing so. While these developments have expanded the potential membership of trade unions, the concept of trade unions as it is formalised in labour legislation in many countries continues to be based on formal, full-time, and stable employment. Such requirements have led workers who do not fulfil this definition to choose not to register their trade union or to establish other types of organisations such as associations, co-operatives, and producer groups. While they may not be registered as trade unions, such organisations have very similar functions and aims. As used in this thesis, the term 'trade union' will therefore refer to traditional trade unions as well as these less formal groups, regardless of their official status or their members' employment status.

Worker

Similar to the term 'trade union', who and what is a 'worker' has been the subject of extensive debate and contestation. Traditional Marxist thought defines a worker as a male, full-time employee who sells his labour but does not own either the means of production or its product, and who is subject to wage discipline (see for example Lee 1998 for a feminist perspective on Marxist theories of production and labour control). Challenging male-biased perceptions of the man as breadwinner and the woman as additional or occasional income-earner, feminists have widened the coverage of the term 'worker' (see for example Pocock 1997b and Pruegl 1999). Yet, in many instances (e.g. labour law), 'worker' still refers primarily to a man. In addition, gender bias makes many traditional trade unions unable to see women as workers or to consider women's demands and needs as issues of concern to trade unions. In this thesis, however, the general term 'worker' refers to both men and women, and encompasses all forms of employment status. Where workers in the formal economy are distinguished from, for example, domestic workers, home-based workers, or contract workers, I will usually refer to these groups with this full specification.

Gender

The term 'gender' is frequently misunderstood, as it is confused with 'sex' (i.e. taken as natural) or taken to refer only to women or to the dichotomous statistical categories of 'male' and 'female'. I will use the term 'gender' to refer to what Connell calls "the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes" (2002:10). This definition has the advantage of navigating between structure and agency in the creation and reproduction of gender through bodily experiences, discourses, and practices. At the same time, this definition avoids a time-specific binary conception of male versus female and equality versus difference.

Gender regime

As mentioned above, the term 'gender regime' is taken from Connell who defines it as "a pattern in gender arrangements ... of an institution" (2002:53). The term 'gender regime' in this thesis refers to the pervasive nature of gender norms and values throughout organisations and institutions such as trade unions, workplaces, the family, the household, and schools. The term also encompasses the constant but sometimes imperceptible processes of reproduction of these gender arrangements through, and in, those organisations and institutions.

Gender equality

The term 'gender equality' is often associated with a liberal feminist discourse that considers unequal treatment and access the main problems for women. According to this perspective, the cure for women's current disadvantages is legal means to enforce equal treatment and educational efforts to prevent discrimination. In this thesis, the term 'gender equality' refers to more than equal treatment and the absence of discrimination. Instead, it encompasses the re-evaluation of the masculine and feminine and all things and beings associated with these terms, and the removal of this value-laden binary from all fields, from philosophy and law to health and education. It therefore includes both theoretical and practical advances for women and men.

Social movements

Definitions of 'social movements' can be found in both sociology and political science. As Cohen and Rai recount, there are transformative, reformative, redemptive or alternative movements, and social movements have been termed unpredictable,

irrational, unreasonable, and disorganised (2000:2-5). Yet, most definitions share three common elements: a conscious attempt to achieve a goal through grouping and organising; the expression of dissent or grievances by those who lack power; and the use of "confrontational and socially disruptive tactics" in order to gain attention (Cohen and Rai 2000:5). Castells defines social movements as "purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society" (1997:3). Similarly, Tarrow (1998) distinguishes between collective action and social movements, the latter being an expression of sustained and contentious action by groups of people. Thus, social movements can comprise a multitude of organisations with more or less the same goal, as is seen, for example, in many women's movements. On the basis of these definitions, this thesis will offer a distinction between mobilising and organising collectively. The former refers to the process of uniting people for what may initially only be collective action, while the latter refers to the activities of a social movement or one of its organisations.

Activism

Activism captures a wide range of behaviours at the micro or macro level that are usually associated with collective action. This thesis uses the term 'activism' to refer to any sustained and visible (or audible) support for a particular aim of an individual or group. In referring to visible action, I acknowledge that much important work to sustain social movements goes on behind the scenes, invisible to the larger public. However, in the context of this thesis, activism will refer to street rallies, pamphlet writing, collective organising work, outreach efforts, and other activities that coalesce around a particular goal and are undertaken in the "public sphere".

Feminism

Definitions of 'feminism' abound, but most have in common a focus on discourses and practices that resist patriarchy by fighting against discrimination based on gender (or against women) and challenging unequal gender relations. Franzway defines 'feminism' as "all ideologies, activities and policies whose goal is to remove discrimination against women and to break down the male domination of society" (2002:15). This definition will be used throughout this thesis.

Women's movements

Post-modern and critical feminists point out the diversity among women and the existence of multiple feminisms (Alexander and Mohanty 1997). Similarly, there is much diversity among women's movements and to speak of only one women's movement would be inappropriate. The term 'women's movements' as used in this thesis refers to any sustained and large-scale collective action by and for women who act upon their group membership in the category 'women', but without regard for which particular women this action may include. Thus, women's movements are not necessarily progressive, feminist or in favour of gender equality, and may include reactionary women's groups that are avowedly anti-feminist. Only where groups, organisations or movements have publicly or, in my interviews with them, stated feminist claims (and have used the word feminist) do I describe them as feminist.

Identity

In this thesis, the term 'identity' is primarily used to refer to "self-ascription as belonging to a group with others who similarly identify themselves, who affirm or are committed together to a set of values, practices, and meanings" (Young 1995:120). Thus, it is not used here in a psychological sense, as has been done in writings about social movements from a social identity perspective.

Chapter outline

This thesis brings together feminist theories about gender, difference, and representation with ideas about social movements to examine on the basis of what identity (or identities) women workers mobilise and organise collectively. Because trade unions and women workers' organisations are part of social movements, Chapter One describes some recent approaches to social movements, and evaluates feminist contributions to this field, with focus on women's position in trade unions, and trade unions as social movements. Feminist analyses of women workers and of social movements have strengthened considerably our understanding of the obstacles to women workers' participation in trade unions that arise from labour regulation and labour control processes in the context of globalisation and neo-liberal restructuring. Based on this review, Chapter One argues for the need to analyse women workers' organisations from a social movement perspective because this can demonstrate the processes through which women workers construct and contest collective identities.

Chapter Two outlines a theoretical perspective on the processes through which women workers constitute, reproduce, and/or contest hegemonic identities as workers, as women, and any other identity that might be significant to them. It applies critical (including post-modern) feminist theories to argue that identities and interests are closely linked and matter in mobilising and organising efforts by union women. Taking note of recent feminist debates on claims of women as a single group, this chapter argues that gender and class identities (or combinations thereof) shape forms of collective action by women workers, depending on the nature of gender and economic regimes. The chapter will argue that in some instances, women workers centre their collective action on struggles for redistribution based on a collective identity as workers. In other instances, women workers politicise gender identity to provide the basis for struggles for recognition of women workers as a group. Young's (1995) suggestion to consider gender as seriality is useful here to link feminist theories of the politics of identity and representation with the question how women workers can organise effectively as women without reinforcing generalisations or hegemonic conceptions of womanhood and gender identity.

Much of women workers' mobilising and organising in developing countries is strongly influenced by the political and economic circumstances in which they work and live. The degree to which the state facilitates or obstructs women's and workers' political representation is relevant here, as is the extent of labour regulation and labour control. Chapters Three and Four explore and compare the importance of labour regulation, women's labour market participation and position, and political space for civil society in Thailand and Indonesia. Although this thesis is not a comparative study in the strict sense of the word, these chapters conclude that differences in labour regulation may influence the ability and likelihood of women workers organising collectively in the two countries under discussion.

To complement the context presented in the previous two chapters, Chapter Five analyses dominant gender regimes and gender relations and their impact on women in trade unions and other workers' organisations in Thailand and Indonesia. This chapter argues that hegemonic gender regimes pose significant challenges to women workers' organisations. Yet, in Indonesia, the dominant gender regime is conducive to organising by women workers because of its emphasis on a common womanhood, in contrast to

Thai society where gender signifies most importantly in conjunction with other markers of difference such as class. Chapter Five concludes by presenting available data on women in trade unions in Thailand and Indonesia, and analysing the obstacles to women's participation and leadership in trade unions.

Chapters Six and Seven provide detailed findings of the fieldwork conducted in Thailand and Indonesia. These chapters track the emergence and operations of two women workers' organisations (one in each country), to illustrate how women workers construct a collective identity around gender and/or class. The focus will be on the meanings that women workers assign to these processes of contestation and reproduction of gender identities and on the claims they make as women workers in their own groups and in trade unions in general. The Conclusion highlights the similarities and differences between Thailand and Indonesia in the ways that women workers respond to, recreate, and reproduce identities for sustained collective action. Lastly, the Conclusion discusses the implications of these findings for the study of women workers as a group, and the prospects for building and extending alliances between women workers and other groups of women in the future.

Chapter 1 - Women workers in social movements: Review of approaches

Introduction

To what extent and how do women workers in Thailand and Indonesia organise based on collective identity, and how are collective identities constructed and contested? This thesis situates these questions within feminist challenges to International Political Economy and to social movement theories. During the past three decades, feminist researchers have studied women workers and their struggles to address the gender-blind nature of much mainstream research in those fields. But in the process, they have also contributed to feminist calls to examine the complexities of gender, race, class, and other dimensions of power in labour struggles. A study of women workers' movements in Southeast Asia would therefore do well to start by scrutinising the methods and ideologies through which women workers have been incorporated in, spoken about and on behalf of in, (mis)represented in, as well as frequently left out of, writings that have touched upon aspects of their mobilising efforts.

After providing a brief background of contemporary social movement theories, this chapter discusses whether these theories should be applied to the labour movement. In other words, are trade unions and workers' organisations social movements? It is argued that, contrary to popular perceptions and although in decline in many regions, trade unions have the potential to become powerful social movements. Secondly, the chapter reviews writings on women workers and their strategies and means for organising worldwide, with particular focus on what these writings can tell us about women workers in social movements such as trade unions. The chapter concludes that social movement theories provide a useful starting point for studying the emergence of collective action by women workers. However, these theories raise a number of important questions about identity-defining factors that have not yet been put at the centre of analyses of women workers' mobilising and organising. These questions lead to an exploration of feminist politics of identity and conceptualisations of women's interests in the next chapter.

Social movement theories

Women workers' attempts at mobilising and collective organising often revolve around oppositional action against employers, managers or the state, but this is not always the case. Witness the existence of numerous social and recreational groups of women workers that aim to provide entertainment and distraction from monotonous work, and the many collective help organisations among women workers that establish loan systems and lighten the economic burden of household maintenance. How can such activities be distinguished from those that may lead to the formation of social movements with a clear agenda and a common opponent? Rather than offer an in-depth discussion of social movement theories, this chapter will outline the broad principles and characteristics of contemporary social movement theories in order to answer this question and to put into perspective their usefulness for the study of women workers' mobilisation in developing countries.

Traditional explanations

We can distinguish three broad tendencies in contemporary explanations for collective action. The first has its origins in Marxism and, focusing primarily on labour protest, considers collective action to result either directly from workers' common position in the capitalist production process or (in more sophisticated analyses) from the active construction of class consciousness and feelings of class solidarity among workers. Such views of class coming into being through deliberate processes and lived experiences as opposed to being constituted as a natural outcome of class structure and class relations have been explored in the works of, for example, Erik Olin Wright and E.P. Thompson, as have their consequences for the study of collective struggle by workers.

The second, referred to as collective behaviour or relative deprivation theory, essentially locates the emergence of collective protest action in "status inconsistency" or the collective experience of grievances (Tarrow 1998; Crossley 2002). The focus here is on concrete and acute shortcomings or changes in status, which motivate the gathering of large numbers of protestors and the expression of discontent. At times, women workers who unite to protest and make claims are indeed motivated by the inequities they observe in society and by the exploitation they experience. For example, Koo (2001) vividly describes how Korean women found the courage to resist employers and managers because of not only the

economic oppression but also the cultural discrimination they faced in comparison to other groups in Korean society. However, looking towards the existence of unfulfilled expectations or status differentials as the source of protest and collective action cannot explain why only a fraction of those who have experienced exploitation or oppression join movements, and why many of those active in social movements have never personally experienced the grievances that motivate them to become active. Additionally, emotional expressions of protest fuelled by grievances are relatively easily co-opted or subdued by granting some of the demands, thus constituting an unlikely explanation for the sustained social movement observed since the 1970s in much of the world. This theory therefore lost popularity in the 1960s because its proponents "tended to underspecify the mobilization process ... [and] because they started from the assumption that collective behavior was outside the routines of everyday life, few of them specified its relationship to the political" (Tarrow 1998:14).

On the other hand, protest and activism that emerge out of a demand for needs-fulfilment can turn into a sustained challenge to authorities, if organisers can harness public discontent even after the direct threat is taken away. To do so, organisers need to prevent co-optation by authorities and channel protestors' emotions into effective repertoires of collective action. This requires a greater focus on issues of resources available to a movement to increase the scale of the action, maintain its membership, and sustain its collective action. This – together with criticism of the underlying assumption in the grievance perspective of movement participants as dysfunctional and irrational actors – fuelled the rise during the 1960s of resource mobilisation as a third explanation for the emergence of social movements, "emphasizing organizational variables in deliberate efforts to mobilize resources in accounting for the growth, development, success and decline of social movements" (Stryker, Owens and White 2000:2). Rather than focusing on the ideological bases of social movements, resource mobilisation scholars were influenced by organisational analysis and examined organisational and institutional dynamics in changing political contexts, such as recruitment and participation, inter-organisational relations, financial support, political structures and processes, and cycles of protest (Klandermans, Staggenborg and Tarrow 2002).

Social movements and identity

The absence of discussion of values, commitment or ideology caused many theorists to infuse the resource mobilisation perspective with alternative models. Under the influence of social psychology, processes of identity construction were increasingly highlighted during the 1990s (e.g. Taylor and Whittier 1992; Stryker, Owens and White 2000), though often as variables independent of power relations in society. Thus, while social psychologists accept the possible existence of multiple identities, these are often seen to be competing for salience at equal levels of importance. Can identities be considered, however, equal in weight and the result of construction by free agents unrestrained by their relative bargaining power in society? While avoiding a return to orthodox Marxist theory in which consciousness arises out of and reflects class position and mode of production, Zugman for example contends that identities are not neutral but instead are an integral part of and are marked by the struggle between dominant and subordinated groups: "this ability to create and live out multiple identities is a gift that only people in 'post-industrial' democracies have" (2003:155). Seen from this angle, theories of identity construction based on social psychology display a disturbing lack of attention to relations of power that in fact are crucial in shaping collective identity, for example, among women workers. This is perhaps not surprising, as much of social movement theory has been based on empirical work carried out in Western Europe and the United States, the so-called 'post-industrial' societies (Klandermans, Staggenborg and Tarrow 2002).

Building on these three perspectives, Tarrow proposes that changes in political opportunity structure provide actors with the necessary openings to transform discontent (one possible motivator of collective action) into an organised movement. At the same time, though, political changes can also constrain collective actors by closing off avenues for protest. Through the concept of political opportunity structure, Tarrow locates the reasons for success or failure of social movements in "consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements" (Tarrow 1998:54).

Distinguishing between collective organising and social movements, Tarrow argues that social movements represent particular sequences of contentious politics that "are based on underlying social networks and resonant collection action frames, and which develop the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents" (Tarrow 1998:2). As part of this definition, he identifies four basic properties of social movements: "mounting collective challenges, drawing on common purposes, building solidarity and sustaining collective action" (1998:4). Collective action is contentious and may result in the formation of a social movement when it is used by people who lack regular access to institutions, act in the name of new or unaccepted claims, and behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others (Tarrow 1998:3). Some collective organising may be short-lived and local, and may not result in the formation of a social movement. But when it is contentious in nature and based on a common adversary and goal, collective organising can thus be considered as an important and necessary step towards building a social movement.

Whether they are an outgrowth of the labour movement or an integral part of women's movements, women workers' groups have the potential to become (part of) a social movement (or social movement organisations). Using Tarrow's definition, collective action by women workers is contentious and can produce a social movement (or contribute to an existing one) when it involves planning for protest against employers or initiating a campaign for legal reform or any other activity that shows claims made in opposition to a common adversary. In such cases, it would be appropriate to use social movement theory to analyse the emergence and the functioning of women workers' groups in developing countries. As Chapters Six and Seven will show, many women workers engage in such contentious politics, though often combined with concern for issues of daily survival.

Many political scientists apply Tarrow's framework of social movements in an instrumentalist fashion, whereby "the relative openness or closure of the institutionalised political system; the stability or otherwise of elite alignments; the presence or otherwise of elite allies; and the state's capacity and propensity for repression" are the parameters that enable or limit the success of social movements (Sperling 1998:194). At the basis of the resource mobilisation perspective (and Tarrow's framework in particular) is an analysis of the forces at work within a traditional nation-state setting that shape the interaction of a social movement with parts of the state. While external influences, transitions or ruptures

may create openings for effective interaction with the state, they may also close off avenues for engagement. Allies within the state structure variously appear or disappear, depending on the wider political, economic and social configurations of power that may pressure the state to resist or constrain a social movement, or may lead to an embrace of or support to a movement (for example see Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht 2003).

Although the sociological resource mobilisation perspective has been criticised for overemphasising structural and institutional factors and rational actors, and for not recognising fields other than the narrowly political (Crossley 2002; Randall 1998; Ray and Korteweg 1999), it has had widespread influence on feminist studies of social movements and collective action (though more frequently of women's movements generally than of women workers). Using Tarrow's framework as a starting point, Keck and Sikkink (1998) have expanded on the concept of political opportunity structure to address transnational collective action and its transformative influence over social movements. Ferree and Martin (1995) and Acker (1995) have explored the various types and roles of organisations that make up and sustain a movement, as well as the processual element in women's organising. Taylor and Whittier (1992) have written about the important role played by the social movement community in sustaining activism, and Taylor (1995, 2000) has called for attention to the role of emotions in the creation of collective identity. Kaplan (1997) emphasised the organic aspects of women's organising, the so-called "primary movement groups" that are important in sustaining formal forms of collective action over long periods of time but are often ignored because their nature is informal:

> While recognizing the importance of informal ties such as friendship networks and connections among church members, collective action theorists frequently view loose associations merely as tendencies guiding potential insurgents toward one organization rather than another. Networks then become means to certain organizational ends rather than strong webs connecting politically vital local groups. According to this line of thinking, leaders and key events directed by highly visible organizations assume greater significance than do processes by which large numbers of people resist oppression and develop programs for transforming society (Kaplan 1997:181).

Challenges to the resource mobilisation theory have come primarily from those who view social movements increasingly as cultural struggles over meaning, rather than purely as instruments towards the achievement of certain goals. The so-called new social movements no longer revolve around struggles for economic equality or national liberation but rather

around identity and meaning. At the core of new social movement theory is the "plurality of the political subject" (Zugman 2003) which is no longer constituted exclusively by class identity but instead may experience a variety of interests at different intersections. Melucci argues that "contemporary social movements, more than others in the past, have shifted towards non-political terrain: the need for self-realization in everyday life. In this respect social movements have a conflictual and antagonistic, but not a political orientation, because they challenge the logic of complex systems on cultural grounds" (1989:23). The difference that Melucci signals here is that many contemporary social movements are not intent on capturing state power but instead have demands that go beyond institutional party politics. Crossley captures this when he argues that "new social movement theory has abandoned the model of politics developed within Marxism wherein it necessarily centred upon parties, revolutions and states, and has sought to explore the broader territories of movements and politics" (2002:152).[1]

New social movements (or at least those social movements centred on identity) can be usefully analysed through Gramsci's insight that civil society is the location of struggles over consent to hegemonic power relations (Castells 1997:8). Thus, civil society is the realm where political transformation takes place through the shaping of social practices and their normalisation in the everyday world. Castells therefore sees as the core of new social movements the emergence of "project identity": "when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by doing so, seek the transformation of overall social structure" (1997:8). This position is similar to that of Escobar who argues that "actors recognize the stakes in terms of a cultural project; in other words, what is at stake for social movements is historicity [the reproduction of social practices through knowledge, economic and ethical models] itself, not merely organizational forms, services, means of production and the like" (1992:71).

Yet, exactly how do such processes of identity formation take place in a context where political and economic rights are routinely ignored and fulfilment of material needs is the main goal for a majority living in (near) poverty? Although struggles over culture and meaning are perhaps increasingly important for women workers, it is difficult to deny the continuing centrality of structures of economic and political inequality for women workers

in developing countries. But rather than returning to class reductionism, "it is both possible and necessary to theorize culture, identity, and language alongside the larger structural political-economic forces that help to shape these processes" (Zugman 2003:154).[2] In this context, relations of both ideological and concrete material domination and subordination still carry weight in processes of identity formation and collective action, and can become the subject of social movement struggles. Thus, while identity and subjectivity are crucial aspects of such struggles, for women workers in developing countries those struggles also involve a politics of redistribution, contrary to the characterisation by the authors above of new social movements as concerned primarily with meaning.

Trade unions and social movement theory

What do these diverse views of social movements mean for the study of trade unions? Before analysing to what extent (and which) trade unions can be called new social movements, this section first reviews recent approaches to the study of labour movements.

Trade unions in the global division of labour

When critics of neo-liberal economic development policies have pointed out the importance and human cost of labour repression by the state and large conglomerates as part of a corporatist or exclusionary system of labour relations (Hadiz 1997; Koo 2001), many have accorded labour a passive role, subjugated to structural forces. For example, Deyo (1987, 1989) attributes what he sees as a lack of workers' resistance to labour repression in Southeast and East Asia to a combination of political, economic, and socio-cultural structures. He therefore claims that "nowhere – not in their workshops, firms, communities, or governments – have workers been able to influence the political and economic decisions that have shaped their lives" (1989:1; see also Rowley and Benson 2000, Frenkel and Harrod 1995, Frenkel 1993). With regard to women workers, Deyo observes that:

> the attraction of young, low-skilled, often female workers to employment characterized by low pay, tedium, minimal job security, and lack of career mobility encourages low job commitment, high levels of turnover, and lack of attachment to work groups or firms. These circumstances impede independent unionization efforts among workers in light export industries (1989:8).

Similarly, Thomas (1995) points out the weaknesses of trade unions worldwide in the face of increasing integration of industrial development, state intervention, and the growth of informal work. Hadiz (2002) argues that labour has lost its political space in much of Southeast Asia as a result of historical circumstances, such as the defeat of communist parties with which labour movements often aligned themselves. These events, compounded by suppression of union movements, a prolonged economic crisis and slow recovery in the late 1990s, and the international mobility of employers have largely prevented trade unions from using the opportunities presented by political transformations such as democratisation or international treaties and conventions. Globalisation is posing new challenges to trade unionism, since it undermines states' efforts (or at least promises and obligations) to protect increasingly mobile workers – who work for increasingly global employers – through national legislation. In sum, such analyses effectively reduce labour resistance in its various forms in Southeast Asia to short-lived and small-scale protest that is powerless in the face of big business and the state.

To be fair, trade unions in many countries in Southeast Asia do indeed lack effective power to challenge either state policies and industrial relations systems or employers' repressive practices. Many trade unions suffer fragmentation because of internal power struggles, are frequently co-opted by political parties, and are weakened through disadvantageous labour practices such as outsourcing, contract work, and informalisation of the workforce (see Chapters Three and Four). Because such trends pose a serious threat to their membership and thus to their representational capacity and political potential, trade unions have frequently been dismissed by observers as anachronistic organisations that are superseded by popular social movements such as anti-globalisation movements. Based most often in assembly lines rather than in workplaces that use information technology and are firmly placed in the "network economy" (Castells 1997), once powerful trade unions have generally responded belatedly and insufficiently to the challenges of globalisation. As one example of their weakness, they have not offered new or more inclusive notions of exploitation that could move them forward in this era of globalised trade and production processes:

> The labor movement seems to be historically superseded ... [it] does not seem fit to generate by itself and from itself a project identity able to reconstruct social control and to rebuild social institutions in the Information Age. Labor militants will undoubtedly be a part

> of new, transformative social dynamics. I am less sure that labor unions will (Castells 1997:360).

In essence, Castells argues that trade unions are no longer dominant agents of social change because the trade union movement has become "a political agent integrated into the realm of public institutions" (1997:354). As such, they are not positioned adequately to respond to the changed circumstances of work in Western countries, namely individualisation of work and the importance of networking and internationalisation for firms. Although these conditions might not all apply in equal measure to the nature of work in developing countries, trade unions here have lost ground due to other weaknesses. For example, in direct reference to Indonesia, Ford (2001) argues that Western paradigms about employment and work do not necessarily directly apply to developing countries and that an identity as worker is not always the most (or even very) meaningful in people's lives. In conclusion, the question why workers would organise in trade unions instead of other social movements is a legitimate one, given the inability of most trade unions to take effective action against (or to mitigate) the excesses of global capitalism.

Nevertheless, in much of the world, paid labour is increasingly considered a necessity rather than a choice (or alternatively as desirable and preferable to unpaid and insecure labour), thus exposing growing numbers of people to the workplace and to fellow workers. Furthermore, far from being stagnant monolithic institutions, trade unions are making gains in some parts of the world. In South Africa and Australia, for example, although overall union density has largely remained stagnant, previously unorganised groups of workers have begun to unite through already existing trade unions, thereby slowly changing the image and even the operational procedures of trade unions. Of particular interest is the growing unionisation of women working in the service and health sectors and in the informal economy where home-based work and contract work are widespread (Hallock 1997; McManus 1997). In Canada, the largest increase in unionised workers has been among women in the urban service sector, while in the United Kingdom unions have also started to attract members among those who least fit the original Marxian definition of worker (Briskin 1999). Thus, there is no reason to assume that trade unions are unable to reinvent themselves or to spawn new organisations that can bring concrete improvements and become agents of social change in the coming decades.

Trade unions as social movements?

Several observers of labour movements (Waterman 2001; Munck 2000a, 2000b) acknowledge that social movements increasingly emerge around identities rather than around concerns for redistribution that are based on objectively determined positions in economic and political structures. However, this shift is not limited to so-called 'new' or 'alternative' social movements such as anti-globalisation protests or women's movements, but potentially extends to workers who can also organise on the basis of identities other than class-based.[3] In a practical sense, the global and fragmented (but networked) nature of production processes has meant that the very basis of organising workers has had to adapt to new realities. Waterman (2001) considers labour's involvement in the anti-globalisation movements of the early twenty-first century as a good example of its attempts to broaden its organisational basis as well as its appeal to workers. In defence of trade unions, Munck argues that they are helped by the increasing willingness of social activists to move beyond traditional dichotomies of political versus economic and work versus community. While he acknowledges the challenges faced by workers worldwide, Munck rejects Castells' prognosis that trade unionism is largely ineffective and trade unions are institutions moribund in the face of globalisation. Instead, he maintains that:

> Once the traditional idea of the working class, as a central unifying feature in the socialist strategies, is abandoned, the doors are opened on a new radical democratic politics more attuned to the needs of [this] century. This, more pluralist, politics clearly entails an engagement with the multiple identities and diverse struggles of the new social movements. ... The growing heterogeneity of the labour force and the increasing impact of 'flexible specialization' can be, and has been, seen as an opportunity for labour even while it is a constraint on traditional strategies. As against a homogeneous working class we now have a heterogeneous labour force. Union leaders presume less to speak 'on behalf' of a mythical working class, instead diverse identities find their own voices and articulate their own strategies. Interest representation in a simple one-to-one model gives way to the pluralism of identity politics (2000a:91-92).

Munck clearly realises that, in order to survive and increase their membership, trade unions need to engage with new social movements, such as the anti-globalisation, environmental, and women's movements. However, to what extent can and do trade unions deliberately organise workers on the basis of identities other than class?

That workers do not necessarily only unite based on class solidarity is evident from Koo's study (2001) of South Korean workers. In it, he shows that the Korean labour movement – far from being unitary in its origins as a class-based movement – during the 1970s and 1980s developed extensive linkages with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), church-based groups and academics, often as part of larger democracy struggles. Through these linkages, trade unions were able to draw on and to some extent pull together the diverse aspects of workers' collective identity as workers. His study highlights the making of a new working class, suggesting that "the same cultural and political factors that are often assumed to have produced labor subordination, such as traditional culture and state oppression, have also worked to facilitate a strong working-class movement in South Korea" (2001:8). Trade unions made use of these strong feelings of common cultural and gender identity to create the basis of a broadly based union identity:

> Korean workers' grievances and resentment were ... derived from multiple sources of oppression rather than simply from low wages and poor working conditions, and this was particularly so for women workers. They were not only economically exploited but also culturally and symbolically oppressed. Thus, in the Korean factory, class exploitation, gender oppression, and status subjugation combined to produce the workers' intense frustration and resentment against the despotic management (2001:16).

Koo's analysis suggests that workers can and do unite through trade unions when trade unions "go beyond" appeals to the traditional Marxian categories of class oppression. By highlighting that worker identity is composed of elements that build on but are not limited to the economic, Koo shows that the Korean labour movement broadened the conceptual bases of its membership as well as its raison d'etre. When social movements recognise that common interests – whether derived from class or other expressions of identity – are necessarily a social construction rather than the unproblematised, presumed outcome of a homogeneous and objectively categorised membership, then we can conceive in a much broader way the solidarity that brings workers together in networks, organisations, demonstrations, and other expressions of collective action.

Thus, workers no longer mobilise – indeed, may never have mobilised – *only* around interests as a working class; this is especially clear among women workers. Furthermore, they increasingly recognise that such interests are an outcome of negotiations and contestations carried out through collective action, rather than the starting point for

collective action. When labour movements (or elements of them) challenge the meanings ascribed to work and to workers' position in society and construct a more broadly based collective identity that includes forces such as gender, citizenship or place (as Gallin (2004) suggests some are doing), I argue that they are on par with the so-called 'new social movements'.

Feminist analyses of women workers' mobilising

The literature on women workers' collective action owes much to the shift in the late 1980s and early 1990s in feminist thinking from women in development to gender and development, for it was the latter that questioned the gender-dimensions of the relocation of manufacturing industries from the developed to the developing world. The increase in labour force participation among young women in regions such as Southeast Asia, the US-Mexican border region, and the Caribbean was not merely analysed in terms of women's contributions to the development effort. Starting with Elson and Pearson (1981), feminists increasingly pointed out the linkages between this new class of industrial workers and global economic and financial changes, and assessed critically women workers' position in the global sexual division of labour, and by extension the gender-dimensions of visions of development as a linear drive towards modernisation.

Research in the 1980s and 1990s on women workers and the global assembly line frequently went beyond the traditionally exclusive focus in international political economy studies on the national and regional levels, instead highlighting the interaction between local and global (e.g. Enloe 1990; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Safa and Leacock 1986; Ward 1990). In particular, this literature showed how women's work was usually low-paid and ill-protected, precisely because it was done by women. Stereotypes of women as a young, docile, and uneducated work force assisted employers and governments alike in shaping Third World women as a cheap labour force that could be discarded when the quest for profits required the removal of the assembly line to the next frontier of cheap labour.

Feminist analyses of labour have often highlighted unequal power relations at the transnational and the local level, recognising the dialectic relationship between gender relations at the local level and global economic structures and labour regimes. Mies (1986),

for example, showed how caste and gender divisions among lace-producing communities in India were reinforced by the requirements of global capital. Beneria and Roldan significantly contributed to feminists' understanding of women's work by showing how "the processes of creation and re-creation of class and gender relations take place simultaneously and involve both material and ideological dimensions" (1987:165). By offering a coherent link between the sexual division of labour and the global political economy, feminists demonstrated that women workers are an integral part of the international political economy, and set the stage for a focus on women workers as autonomous subjects of research.

To assess studies of women workers' mobilising and organising efforts, it is useful to distinguish the different aspects of social movements that have been foregrounded. A number of common characteristics can be observed in feminist studies of women workers' organising. To varying degrees, these commonalties correspond to the four properties of social movements that Tarrow (1998) has described: "mounting collective challenge, drawing on common purposes, building solidarity, and sustaining collective action." While some feminists have addressed women workers' mobilising from a rather empirical angle in which political opportunity structure takes centre-stage, others are more interested in the cultural and epistemological aspects. The next sections discuss the insights that feminists have added to each of these properties, highlighting the questions that arise when discussing women workers' expressions and forms of collective action in the framework of social movement theories. It is important to note that Tarrow's four properties of social movements are used here as a tool to 'group' feminist analyses of women workers' mobilising, and that his definition and framework remain subject to challenges by feminists and others.

Collective challenge

Feminists have documented the engagement of women workers in collective struggles during the past 150 years and the challenges they have posed in the form of disruption of the practices or discourses of others (in other words, mounting collective challenges). Their analyses have included observations of women in strike action (Beckwith 1996, 1998; Fonow 1998; Tilly 1981) and accounts of women workers' activism in labour organisations

or lack thereof in developing countries (Chhachhi and Pittin 1996; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994; Martens and Mitter 1994; Saptari 1995). Especially the last category of analyses increasingly draws direct linkages between, on the one hand, the settings of women's labour and the industrial relations systems under which they work, and on the other hand, women's lived experiences and potential for resistance.

A large part of this literature concentrates on case studies recounting best practices of how to organise groups of women workers who are often called "difficult to organise". These include Free Trade Zone workers, home-based workers, migrant workers, domestic workers, and sex workers (Enloe 1990; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994; Martens and Mitter 1994; Boris and Pruegl 1996; Ledwith and Colgan 2002; Hensman 1996, 2002; Chhachhi and Pittin 1996; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Wee and Sim 2003). The negative attitude of many trade unions and federations towards integration of (particular) women into their membership[4] – as well as the immediate economic necessities of women living in poverty – have contributed to this particularly practical focus of the literature. The increasing visibility of so-called 'unusual' forms of work highlights women's different experiences in the labour market. However, there are too few studies that tell us through what organisational forms the millions of women in 'regular' kinds of employment, especially in rural areas, sustain their collective action.

Furthermore, such analyses have often aimed to explain women's organising or lack thereof largely as a function of their gendered position in the labour force and the production process. For example, Diane Wolf (1992) notes that rebellion by young women is frequently more successful at home than in the factory. Although consciousness about their unequal position as women appears to flow over from home to the factory, Wolf argues that the particular shape of capitalist development in Indonesia prevents young women from organising collective action in the workplace (see also Saptari 1995).

The Committee for Asian Women (1995), an Asian regional NGO concerned with women workers' rights, reports on the difficulties of unionisation in South Korea, which during the 1980s was the first Asian country to experience outsourcing. In South Korea, the increasing use of subcontracting chains in garments and electronics manufacturing comprised the formation of small working groups within the original factory, though these working

groups were each considered to be individual and independent subcontracting factories. The small size of each group (20 women) made it virtually impossible for women to form a union or organise collective protest. The ease with which unionised workers could (and still can) be fired contributed to the general feeling of uncertainty and fear among workers. These conditions resulted in reluctance to undertake labour activism and declining labour unity among women workers. Many other industries and countries throughout Asia have now also experienced rapid declines in unionisation rates for similar reasons (Gallin 2004; Oxfam 2004a).

Economic restructuring has clearly forced women workers in diverse parts of the world to search for innovative ways of organising, in order to "interrupt, obstruct, or render uncertain" (Tarrow 1998:5) capitalist structures and processes that often make traditional trade unionism impossible. Much can be learned from the patterns of globalisation and economic restructuring, their impact on women workers, and women workers' responses, as described by Asian Exchange (1995), Beneria and Roldan (1987), Chhachhi and Pittin (1996), Enloe (1990), Marchand and Runyan (2000), Rai (2002b), Razavi (1999), Rowbotham and Mitter (1994), Theobald (2002), Tjandraningsih (2000), Ward (1990), and Wolf (1992). However, women workers' collective action is frequently more than a means to achieve social justice. Its meaning may extend to become an end in itself for the empowerment of workers, and organising by women workers may therefore imply more than the existence of a struggle over working conditions. It follows that success and failure go beyond the immediately visible outcomes of the struggle to encompass what the process of struggle has meant for the participants (including its unintended consequences).

Thus, above and beyond instrumental interpretations, collective challenge by women workers also implies cultural struggles over meaning, symbols, and naming processes. Detailing women's role in strike action in Virginia in the late 1980s, Beckwith recounts that "the construction [by the union] of class as collectivity ... emphasized class identity at the expense of a gendered identity of women as women" and was therefore challenged by participating women (1998:154). The women workers' organisations described by Enloe (1990), Rowbotham and Mitter (1994), and Pruegl (1999) challenged narrow masculine-biased definitions of who is a worker, who can or is allowed to organise collectively, and what type of organisation constitutes collective action. Analyses of women's movements

also challenge the masculine notion that social movements are confined to the formal, public sphere and point out that women's movements are "groups with a self-consciousness or awareness of being a group and with some level of organisation, although not all members necessarily participate in those organisations" (Stienstra 1999:263; see also Sperling 1998 and Lind 2000). Collective challenges by women workers in new (or newly visible) forms of employment have therefore 'disrupted' conventional notions of who is a worker and what we understand to be work, workplaces, and sites for collective action, much in the fashion of 'new social movements'.

In an era when labour organising increasingly diverges from any traditional model, "organising ... is centered on sites of social reproduction rather than on production, the home, the school, and public transportation" (Zugman 2003:161). Women workers are likely to break down barriers between what are considered the public and private sphere, recognising the artificial and often arbitrary nature of this divide. In diverse circumstances around the world (but especially in Latin America), this has led women to emphasise their identities as mothers and wives as a form of collective protest (Radcliffe 1993). Because of women's frequent responsibility for household and children's wellbeing, an inability to fulfil traditional roles may act as encouragement for collective action. Kaplan (1997) sees much participation and leadership by women in collective action as stemming from "female consciousness", which is not biologically based but rather derived from women's gender roles as wives and mothers and the protection of life that these roles involve. Women are thus inclined to extend issues of family and household survival to questions of morality and social justice. This may take the shape of 'tactical essentialism', but may alternatively be based on deeply felt emotional ties to highly valued or highly symbolic roles and responsibilities in society, community and household. Although such action may be predicated on what Molyneux (1985) has called practical gender needs (for survival in accordance with traditional gender roles), it may nonetheless carry political implications beyond its original intentions.

Much collective action by women challenges conservative notions of the public-private divide not only through women's bodily presence in the public arena but also through 'framing', that is, the articulation of movement issues and the process of infusing them with meaning for both supporters and adversaries. Tarrow notes that "framing not only relates to

the generalization of a grievance, but defines the 'us' and 'them' in a movement's conflict structure", in other words creates boundaries between members and adversaries (1998:21; see also Taylor and Whittier 1992). Radcliffe (1993) and Alvarez (1990) show how women activists in Latin America have at times taken advantage of constructions by politicians and religious leaders of women as mothers and caretakers of the family and household. Such constructions allowed them to mobilise based on their identities as mothers of political dissidents, hence locating and politicising unexpected spaces for collective action. Thus, framing allows women to define themselves and their issues strategically, using traditional gender roles that are given new meanings, or mobilising new and more confrontational images and symbols.

Feminist contestations around meanings and definitions of collective challenge are also important in a practical sense, given that social movement theorists such as Tarrow (1998) and McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996) point to the role of a shared historical experience in constructing common meanings and creating group solidarity. Feminists have long challenged the construction of such shared meanings and experiences on exclusively male terms, including in the workplace where trade unionism is still frequently regarded as an attribute of masculinity. By uncovering and celebrating women's union activism in the past and present and in both usual and unexpected locations, feminists and the movements they describe expand common definitions of what is political action (Tilly 1981; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994). They thereby focus attention on everyday forms of politics and resistance, a phenomenon given wide circulation by James Scott (1985) and which incorporates new 'repertoires of protest' practised by women workers. These include theft, sabotage, absenteeism, fainting, and hysteria, in contrast to strikes, work stoppage, picket lines, and other traditional and more organised expressions of contention (Ong 1987; Lee 1998; Wolf 1992; Smyth and Grijns 1997; Mills 1999; Tjandraningsih 1995).

However, the question remains to what extent and how such individual, more or less spontaneous, and often symbolic forms of resistance are extended or duplicated by women workers in collective and more permanent forms of organising. How can they form the basis for group solidarity? Kaplan (1997) has described in detail the extensive informal networks that link women activists in the United States and South Africa at the local level (around issues of the environment, housing, and poverty). Yet, the above studies largely

omit the mention of what holds together (or has the potential to hold together) women workers' acts of subversion or resistance at or near workplaces. Alternatively, they assume a natural progression from individual to collective action, whereas it is important to specify the manner in which such expansion of scale occurs and the factors that mediate it.

Common purpose and solidarity

Analyses about women workers' organising in developing countries frequently describe the reasons women hesitate to or are prevented from establishing or joining unions and other workers' organisations, whereas the question that needs to be asked is what drives some women workers to claim a voice. They emphasise mostly the system-specific obstacles to women's participation arising from male-dominated trade union leadership and women's particular location in the workforce, as well as gender-specific obstacles such as the unequal domestic burden faced by many women (discussed further in Chapters Three and Five). However, reviewing previous analyses of women in trade unions in developed countries, Lawrence (1994) rightfully notes that the removal of obstacles to women's participation does not guarantee that women will join unions or their activities. It follows that women's diverse reasons for joining unions should be examined carefully in order to understand the processes through which women workers recognise or construct a common purpose and feelings of solidarity.

Reasons for joining a movement organisation will differ depending on the level at which the organisation is active, i.e. at the national, regional, or local level (Kaplan 1997), which will in turn have consequences for visions of the movement as a means to an end or as an end in itself (Melucci 1989). In the United States, women were variously found to have joined unions in order to gain economic independence, because they had less to lose than their male colleagues in terms of risk to promotion, because of the influence of feminist politics, or because occupational segregation meant that there were no men around to represent them (Lawrence 1994:14-20). In Australia, Franzway (2002:56-62) found many union women to have been motivated by a sense of social justice, in addition to some who spoke about their hopes and expectations in terms of traditional unionism. These findings invite an assessment of the rewards women workers expect from trade unionism in each

instance, their position in the labour market, and their experiences in the organisational structure and culture of trade unions.

Taking into account cultural and historical particularities, women in developing countries perhaps face different constraints and are motivated by different rewards than were found by Lawrence in the United States and Franzway in Australia. Since women's struggles usually occur in relation not (only) to global but (also) to local political or economic developments (Basu 1996), considering these struggles in their historical and cultural context will expose what may be less generalisable but often more significant elements. For example, home-based garment workers in Mexico-City began to organise when their employers' responses to the devastating 1985 earthquake demonstrated the nature and extent of worker exploitation (Enloe 1990; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994). Although in almost all contexts union women deal with "sexual politics" (Franzway 2002) in institutions based on patriarchal norms, the particular forms of patriarchy as evident in gender regimes and gender norms will differ in each country (Connell 2002).

Because social movements increasingly revolve around expressions of collective identity, participation in them may also be contingent on a movement offering members sufficient opportunities for self-identification. In practical terms, the construction and recognition of common purpose within and through a trade union "relies upon identifying with the issues that the union pursues and the image and symbolism of unionism" (McManus 1997:32). Franzway argues that without investigating the sexual politics of trade unions, they remain "men's movements" and gender issues remain "attached to women":

> The fact that the trade union movement has been dominated by men numerically, culturally and hierarchically throughout its history is often overlooked, a view that is confirmed by assumptions that men are gender-neutral. Men's gender difference, including their sexuality, is denied, and thus what is specific to men, their dominance of the trade union movement, can be ignored (2002:93).

Similarly, writing about North American union women, Forrest criticises industrial relations thinking for overlooking gender:

> The basic assumption that underlies much of the analysis is that, whatever women are doing, they are women first and foremost and driven by motivations uniquely female ... Men are never compared with women: men are assumed to be workers while women are

not. Indeed, industrial relations constructs men *only* as workers and never as men" (Forrest 1993:330-1).

Given that the prevailing image (and leadership) of unions worldwide is still predominantly male (Chhachhi and Pittin 1996), some studies of women workers investigate how women formulate their common vision, sustain feelings of identification, reach agreement on the modalities of action, and manage internal and external differences (Arifin 1988; Pineda-Ofreneo and Del Rosario 1988; Beckwith 1998; Saltzman 2001). Configurations of power, political culture, and the type of arena in which contentious action is located, influence the emergence and expression of collective identity, and the choice of that identity. For example:

> Beyond the specific concerns and circumstances of individual strikes, national contexts ... shape the content and expression of the collective identities of women in movements. Where class consciousness is strong, gender-based consciousness and solidarity among women 'as women' will evince a developmental pattern and content different from those that emerge in contexts where class consciousness is diffuse or positioned in competition with ethnic- or religious-based identities, for example (Beckwith 1998:150).

Zugman's (2003) study of women workers' organising on the Mexican-American border in the early 1990s provides a good example of the local context. She describes the disjunction between the traditional (racialised) workers' identity put forward by the local union, and the identities as mothers and wives that women workers felt were meaningful to their lives and their experiences of the workplace. But while the competitive production process directly prevented women from organising, Zugman focuses not on these structural impediments but rather on the company management's use of language and discourse of family and community to ensure the women's deference to management. Whereas in this case unions saw a lack of class consciousness as the reason for the women's refusal to unionise, the women workers themselves were confronted with a union identity that did not recognise their cultural background and the family discourse they faced from the company management. It thus becomes clear that for these women the struggle to organise also involved a struggle to assign a different meaning to the identity of motherhood against the company's dominant discourse and to challenge the limited sense of common purpose put forward by local unions. Thus, it makes sense to analyse "patterns of gender power in many institutions and over long historical periods" in order to understand better the workings of gender, class and race in trade unions (Cockburn 1994:111).

Sustaining collective action

When examining what accounts for the continuation of collective action over a longer period of time in the face of practical and strategic obstacles, many studies of women workers have focused on these women's propensity to question organisational structure and to instigate changes to it. Franzway (2002) describes the efforts of union women to question the dual commitment required of women by their unions and by their households, thus exposing the importance of broader feminist issues for union women. Ford (2001), on the other hand, analyses how the organisational characteristics of women's NGOs impact on the aims and needs of women workers in Indonesia. More generally, studies of women's movements have called attention to the different organisations involved in a movement. For example, Ferree and Martin (1995) distinguish between the American women's movement and the organisations that sustain it through their activities, akin to the submerged networks described by Melucci (1989). Together these studies show the importance of distinguishing the different types of organisations involved in a movement.

In relation to sustaining collective action, it is especially relevant for feminists to examine how a social movement based on identity, such as a women's movement or trade unions, relates to other social movements. Several studies have questioned the nature of relations between women workers' organisations, the mainstream trade union movement, and the women's movement, with some drawing attention to global or transnational linkages (Cohen and Rai 2000; Enloe 1990; Hensman 2002; Ledwith and Colgan 2002; Ray and Korteweg 1999; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994). Successful collaboration beyond networking may indeed be rare in practice, with the exception of some Latin American and Indian feminist organisations (Gandhi 1996; Alvarez et al. 2003). The Australian women trade unionists interviewed by Franzway experienced serious discrimination at the hands of their male colleagues, yet did "not regard the women's movement as a resource or a site where they might contest feminist politics" (1997:137).

How much support do the emerging transnational labour movement or women's movements offer to women workers' organisations in Southeast Asia and what determines their attitude? According to some, competing class interests account for the inability or

unwillingness of women's movements to problematise women workers' issues (for example Cook 1998 on Thailand). Others, in contrast, put the blame partially on leftist movements which "seem incapable of overcoming the 'natural' division of labor between men and women" (Ray and Korteweg 1999:63) and link the issue back to the question whether autonomy or affiliation will best serve the advancement of women's interests.

When discussing strategies employed by women workers to sustain their collective action, union women and union observers have debated the advantages and disadvantages of separate organising or autonomy as opposed to integration into unions (Briskin 1999; Franzway 2002; Gandhi 1996). Why would (and do) women workers organise separately from the labour, women's, and other movements? Is it because mainstream interest groups do not represent them or because their interests do not fit into any one already existing group? Addressing a South Asian context of a male-dominated trade union movement and a largely unsympathetic or overburdened women's movement, Hensman (1996) suggests that only "a women workers' movement that is autonomous from the trade union movement" can achieve significant improvements in gender equality inside and outside the workplace. This would imply that women workers must continue to wage struggles both as constituencies *within* movements such as the trade union movement (for recognition of their interests as women) and as members of larger movements (for interests that they share with men as workers).

Strategies on how to sustain collective action by women workers (both as an outcome and as a prerequisite) are central to this debate. Chapters Six and Seven will analyse in more detail how this debate plays out in women workers' organisations, trade unions, and women's movements in Thailand and Indonesia. What is relevant to note here is that, while focusing on organisational strategies, the above-mentioned studies take as a given the existence of a common purpose and solidarity on which women workers are expected to build their collective action.

However, the diverse strategies to sustain collective action not only reflect concerns over the effectiveness of different forms of protest and movement. They also reveal much about the cultural struggles being waged by women workers and point to debates about the meaning of the collective action and its aims. In the context of Latin America, Alvarez et

al. (2003) note that the feminist movement during the past two decades has faced internal rifts based on differences of opinion concerning feminist interpretations of equality and difference. In other instances, women organise separately to avoid the loss of identity that would occur if they became part of mass movements or if they were perceived to be part of the state structure (Hellman 1992). Thus, separate or autonomous structures for women (or for women workers) do not only refer to spaces where women can build their skills and discuss their issues free from male domination and in a supportive environment (until such a time when they can be integrated at equal level with men).

For many feminists, such structures are in fact places where an alternative culture is allowed to flourish, where hierarchy is challenged, and where power and identity can be reappropriated (Lind 1992; Acker 1995). Although radical feminism is not influential in Southeast Asia, some cultures in this region have elements of gender-segregated traditions based on a belief in women's difference from men (see Chapters Five to Seven). This may increase the appeal of autonomous organising, in addition to the practical necessity of providing women with safe spaces to organise. Thus, the emergence of separate or integrated women workers' organisations reflects cultural and political processes in each context. As Acker (1995) concludes, organisations are embedded in class, racial, gender, and other structures in society, which undermine or support particular ways of organising.

Feminists have also argued that much of the literature on social movements does not recognise the gendered nature of sustaining collective action or explain the particular organisational forms that mobilising and organising among women workers often takes (Stienstra 1994 and 1999; Goetz 1997). For example, women workers' organisations appear to be particularly often engaged in transnational or cross-border advocacy such as the Clean Clothes Campaign when compared with traditional, male-dominated trade unions (Kuehl 2003; Wick 2003). But why women workers' organisations have such different repertoires of contention and strategies remains to be examined. For example, when feminists have written about the gender differences involved in collective challenges, they have focused primarily on transnational movements rather than local-level movements or networks (Stienstra 2000; Cohen and Rai 2000). However, by privileging outside influences they leave unanswered the question: how may the political, economic and cultural context (both globally and locally) shape women workers' organisational strategies.

Similarly, the organisational influence of trade union leadership and its rhetoric is sometimes overstated, at the expense of the role played by cultural and ideological factors (for example Beckwith 1998). If women's specific ways of organising exist, do gender differences arise out of circumstances or priorities particular to women's experiences or the culture in which they are located, or are they the result of organising according to explicitly feminist principles? Or are they the result of deliberate strategies to draw women participants into the movement? These questions deserve further research.

Transnational organising

Recent analyses have made clear that women workers in many places are increasingly using strategies characteristic of transnational social movement organisations, such as new modes of communication, international and cross-border alliances and advocacy, and new modalities of organising members at local levels (Zugman 2003; Gallin 2004). It is therefore important to review the transnational aspect of women workers' organising and mobilising. The more structure-oriented social movement theories (collective grievances and resource mobilisation) until recently assumed the centrality of people's challenges vis-à-vis the nation-state or local employers. However, increasingly globalised modes of production and consumption have expanded the nature of common purpose and solidarity beyond borders in ways that previously were attempted only by some labour movements.

According to Keck and Sikkink, the resulting new transnational advocacy networks that have gained global influence during the past thirty years "must be understood as political spaces, in which differently situated actors negotiate – formally or informally – the social, cultural, and political meanings of their joint enterprise" (1998:3). Keck and Sikkink describe several factors that are likely to give rise to transnational advocacy networks: nationally based actors seeking contact across borders to put pressure on the state; the expectation that networking can strengthen campaigns; and the establishment and strengthening of networks through international conferences and other cross-border arenas (1998:12).

What significance does analysis of transnational advocacy networks hold for studies of women workers' organising? Although the primary subject of this thesis is mobilisation and organisation at the local level rather than transnational activism, each of the above factors is of importance in shaping national or local women workers' organisations. Although born out of the particular circumstances of their individual location, women workers' organisations have been influenced to a great extent by international or global circumstances: through the international conferences of the United Nations and global NGOs; the circulation of the language of human rights and women's rights; and the rapid spread of information and discourse beyond borders. Chapters Six and Seven show that women workers' groups also mobilise powerful symbols that circulate globally and use global and regional alliances for leverage politics (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Stienstra adds that "given the nature of transnational women's movements, we can assume that women will organize in diffuse rather than unitary ways, with flexible structures [and] many alliances" (2000:212). As such, the characteristics of transnational advocacy movements provide useful starting points for the study of local movements.

Yet, the transnational framework as proposed by Keck and Sikkink applies most effectively to networks that oppose the state, given its focus on strategies to hold states accountable and to push for policy change at the national level. More research is needed to determine its usefulness and its limitations when applied to less unitary actors such as networked companies, employers, and investors, who often are the target of workers' organising (though see Enloe 1990 and Zugman 2003 for examples of the difficulties of transnational alliances). The emerging literature on codes of conduct and similar alternative tools to hold companies accountable for workers' rights offers interesting clues in this regard, but has not focused sufficiently on either gender issues or social movements (Wick 2003).

Symbols and values circulate globally through media, legal and popular discourses – discourses to which women workers have unequal access due to poverty, exclusion or disempowerment. There is therefore an urgent need for focus on transnational organising 'from below' as it occurs and is experienced at local levels and among marginalised groups (Marchand and Runyan 2000:158). Research on well-educated women in urban, often large-scale and transnational organisations or networks (Tinker 1999; Stienstra 2000) shows the importance of a global identity as activist which women frequently use in order

to legitimise what might otherwise be seen as overstepping traditional gender boundaries. However, women living in poverty who frequently mobilise in unofficial, marginalised groupings at grassroots level (Kaplan 1997) may well have significantly different experiences in relation to public activism. Therefore, the experiences of Northern-based and/or elite women's organisations and activists cannot be assumed to be the same in low-income countries and communities.

Lastly, by linking local forms of gender inequalities directly with transnational activism, feminists such as Chandra Mohanty (1997) omit the crucial stage of the formation of local collective action. Mohanty writes of "her belief that 'common differences' can form the basis of deep solidarity" (2003:3) and focuses on "an anticapitalist transnational feminist practice – and on the possibilities, indeed on the necessities, of cross-national feminist solidarity and organizing against capitalism" (2003:5). However, while transnational networks feed on and support local organising by women workers, global or cross-border labour or women's activism cannot be assumed to bring forth automatically large-scale local movements. These limitations point to areas where further research is needed, and where social movement theories might be usefully applied in conjunction with a gender and transnational perspective.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that applying social movement theories to the study of women workers' mobilising and organising efforts (whether within trade unions or autonomously) brings to the fore both the factors specific to particular political and economic regimes that influence the outcomes of these efforts and the meanings inherent in these efforts or expressed through them by women workers. Resource mobilisation perspectives provide insights about the concrete constraints and possibilities facing women workers due to the political and economic context in which they operate and in which they formulate their goals and strategies. On the other hand, by examining women workers' organisations from a cultural viewpoint, it becomes clear that these organisations may be part of a network of organisations and movements that challenges political practices and discourses that reproduce unequal relations of power. Although some analyses of women workers have tended to view mobilising and organising from a purely institutional angle, others have

grappled with the complexities of collective identity formation and its consequences for building and sustaining collective action. It is the latter category that has located in women workers' mobilisation and organisation the potential for a broader struggle over access to power, and in particular over gendered mechanisms of power. These conclusions provide a basis for explorations in Chapter Two of the collective interests and identities that form the foundation of women workers' groups in Thailand and Indonesia.

With respect to the meanings that women workers themselves ascribe to their collective action, this chapter has argued for the importance of understanding the processes through which women workers constitute and contest a collective identity that allows them to voice their interests. Because these processes are unstable and contingent on political, cultural and economic contexts, the next chapter attempts to shed light on how women workers address and resolve the tensions between the different identities (and identity-defining factors) that may flow from (or are allowed to be expressed by) these contexts. How and around what politics do they mobilise, and how do their strategies shape possibilities for alliances with other social movements or movement organisations? More broadly, when women workers organise in groups that could be identified by outsiders as women's or workers' groups, are they making any claims in relation to womanhood and dominant gender identities? Chapter Two will present a theoretical investigation into the role of identity in women's movements and their organisations, using feminist theories of women as a collectivity and of the politics of difference and representation as its starting points.

[1] Others disagree with the differentiation between 'old' and 'new' social movements, calling the gap "overblown" (Hobson 2003:1).

[2] Zugman objects to the often-used distinction between old and new social movements: "the distinction between the 'new' (environmentalism, identity politics) and the 'old' (social justice movements, unions) does not allow us to understand movements like Fuerza Unida [a Mexican-American women workers' organisation] that straddle these definitions. Sociology ought to move beyond this dichotomy, with sociologists viewing activism as emerging in response to regional economic integration. To theorize these movements effectively, white middle-class individuals can no longer be the starting point for understanding subjectivity – the center of social movement theory. Workforces in the United States and the world are becoming increasingly racially diverse. If sociologists wish to comprehend the dynamics of social change and consciousness, we must understand that sexism, colonialism, and racism are historical forces that shape the consciousness of the workforce of the new millennium, as well as our own consciousness" (Zugman 2003:162).

[3] My focus here on class and gender should by no means be interpreted to mean that these are the only dimensions of identity that have the power to mobilise people into collective action (this issue will be revisited in Chapters Five to Seven). For example, Perry illustrates the relative insignificance of class by pointing out that many workers in China "have been more consumed with the politics of 'place' – a quest for social and cultural status entailing a desire to elude, rather than to embrace, the ranks of the proletariat – than with a 'class' struggle to further their interests qua workers" (1996:3).

[4] Although many federations in Europe and the United States clearly recognise the importance of women for the revitalisation of unions and have publicly declared their commitment to gender equality in unions (e.g. the 1994 statement made by the two main Dutch trade union federations FNV and CNV before the Beijing Fourth Conference on Women), this has had little impact beyond state-borders. From time to time, federations in developing countries sound similar calls but these have yet to be acted upon with adequate resources necessary to realise gender equality (with South African unions being a notable exception). This leads me to conclude that a majority of trade unions in developing countries remain hostile to the promotion of gender equality, or at best reluctant to take significant steps in that direction.

Chapter 2 - Social movements, recognition and the politics of Identity

Introduction

Chapter One noted that social movement theory increasingly takes account not only of system-specific constraints and opportunities to women workers' mobilising and organising but also of the cultural struggles around identity and meaning in which women workers engage in developing and developed countries. Studies of women's collective action in general and women workers in particular show that the modes and forms of such organising are intimately related to challenges to processes of knowledge-making and participation in particular contexts of gender, class, race, age, and ethnicity. But notwithstanding feminists' recognition that women workers are active agents in resisting global capitalism, so far few accounts have examined the specific identity-constituting processes through which women workers come to formulate, consolidate, and express their collective interests as a group. What motivates women workers to act collectively and to see themselves as a group? How are the claims they make related to the identities through which they organise? For example, groups of women workers in Thailand have formed organisations (self-described as 'women workers' though not as feminist) that manifestly are concerned with particular women workers' issues and general labour issues, but hardly with general women's issues that do not *directly* impact on the workplace. What political, economic, and cultural processes do such groups reflect through their collective identities and through their common interests? In trying to answer these questions, this chapter employs critical feminist theory to analyse the modalities and meanings of women workers organising in developing countries.

This chapter has three main aims: to show that identities are at the basis of women's mobilisation and are constitutive of the interests expressed by their collective action; to link identities with post-modern questions about women as a group; and to explore how gender difference may be used in women workers' struggles for recognition and redistribution. After exploring the concept of interest in the first section, the chapter discusses feminist

perspectives on the politics of identity and their relationship to social movement theories discussed in Chapter One. It is argued that identity alone does not define interest because not all identities will be politically meaningful; identity requires self-conscious acting upon relevant conditions encountered in life to lead to formulation of interests. Yet, group interest is deliberated and formulated through groups that are an expression of collective identity and that thus reflect common responses to those diverse conditions. Hence it is important to consider the processes through which groups or organisations come to reflect and convey group interests and construct a common identity.

For post-modern (and other) feminists, the social construction of groups raises questions about the types of identities that are validated when women are seen to form a group. Here the chapter will draw on the work of Iris Young (1995) to differentiate between 'serial collectivity' and groups with politicised identity, in order to overcome problems of exclusion and universalism. The remainder of the chapter deals with the recognition aspect of women's movements or organisations, in other words women's struggles for political voice and inclusion (as analytically distinct from struggles for redistribution). Here it will be argued that women's activism is shaped by cultural, political, and especially gendered norms of public participation and representation. Based on feminist theories of the politics of presence, in particular the arguments put forward by Anna Jonasdottir and Anne Phillips, the last sections of the chapter argue that gender difference may be used strategically in struggles for recognition but that this use may be in tension with women's struggles to form coalitions and alliances around issues of redistribution. The conclusion of the chapter highlights possibilities for women workers to build local and transnational alliances in their struggles for political inclusion and voice.

From interests to politics of identity

While many feminists have written about demands that follow from women's interests (e.g. the struggle to end violence against women, the fight for equal wages, or the right to inherit property), few have tried to construct theoretical frameworks to study women's interests. One approach would be to label all interests that are experienced and expressed by women as gender interests. Another would be to label only those needs and desires related to women's distinct social and economic role as gender interests, explicitly differentiating

women from men. Molyneux (1985, 1998) provided some clarity to the debate by proposing a conceptual distinction between those interests that arise in response to women's attempts to fulfil daily needs in keeping with their gender roles (practical gender interests), and those that derive from the aim to challenge those gender roles (strategic gender interests). She writes: "In the formulation of practical interests there is the assumption that there is compliance with the existing gender order, while in the case of strategic interests there is an explicit questioning of that order and of the compliance of some women with it" (1985:235). Strategic interests can therefore usually be described as feminist interests, insofar as they challenge the status quo and implicitly foresee a redistribution of resources, tasks, and power relations affecting women.

Because researchers and practitioners in Gender and Development have frequently used the practical-strategic gender needs terminology, they have also refined it (for example Moser 1989). With reference to poor women's movements in Ecuador, Lind warns against a focus on practical interests alone:

> It is too often assumed that most poor women are only concerned with their daily survival and therefore do not have a strategic agenda beyond their economic welfare. Hence, such women are not *really* challenging the sexual division of labor. Again, the plight of organized poor women is based on a notion of gender/class struggle, in which women fight on behalf of their households because of their particular reproductive roles. This type of analysis overlooks the critical contributions and challenges that organized poor women conceivably represent to the social order. Rarely, if ever, is discussion focused, for example, on how poor women negotiate power, construct collective identities, and develop critical perspectives on the world in which they live – all factors that challenge dominant gender representations (1992:137; emphasis in original).

Similarly, writing about women's movements in Brazil, Alvarez points out that women's interests are too diverse to be able to divide them meaningfully into categories, as their articulation depends on both organisational and ideological resources, as well as political context:

> The formulation and articulation of gender interests does not flow 'naturally' from women's class position, race, or ethnicity, nor is it directly derivative of women's insertion into dependent capitalist relations of production and reproduction. If class, race, or dependency are *constitutive* of strategic and practical gender interests ... they *do not determine* how such interests are ideologically framed or politically advanced (1990:265; emphasis in original).

Thus, a focus on interests as either practical or strategic obscures the ways in which women may use seemingly practical interests to challenge their marginalised collective identity and politicise their needs. Although some analyses of women workers' organising discount the importance of women's participation in traditional protest over wages or overlook it entirely (because it does not explicitly concern gender issues), it is entirely possible that through such collective action women challenge the norms of public versus private and shift the boundaries of what is acceptable behaviour for women. Thus, struggles for redistribution cannot and should not be divorced from struggles for recognition of a particular group (Fraser 1995, 2003; Phillips 2003). The issue is not so much how to characterise interests, but how some women may use the expression of these interests to challenge their marginalised identity or construct a new collective identity as a group. Rai concludes that "both needs and interests are formulated in particular contexts that frame the processes of making choices. Because of this situatedness of interests, we also cannot take 'women's interests' as an acceptable convergence, except in a minimalist sense" (2002b:165).

It therefore seems unlikely that interests derive directly from one's position in political and economic structures as observed by outsiders. Rather, while they cannot be imputed directly from presumed identity, interests are surely constituted by the subjective experience of identities. Tarrow acknowledges that interest may be "no more than an objective category imposed by the observer" (Tarrow 1998:5). Similarly, Ray and Korteweg argue that "rather than imputing identity from articulated interests, and asking whether meeting these interests would change subjectively held identity, [social movement] scholars now centre identity, asking what subjectively held sense of self motivates women to act collectively" (1999:50; see also Lee 1998). The centrality of identity rather than interests in social movements is evident from the literature on new social movements, as described in Chapter One.

This raises the fundamental question how we are to conceptualise (let alone expect) solidarity between women workers – or in any social movement – when we run the risk of assuming interest on the basis of an objectively determined position in political or economic structures. As Molyneux warns, "claims about women's objective interests need to be framed within specific historical contexts since processes of interest formation and

articulation are clearly subject to cultural, historical and political variation and cannot be known in advance" (1998:77). In later sections, this chapter returns to the role of women's interests in the construction of groups or social movements, but first it explores the question how feminists and new social movement theory have related identities and subject positions to mobilisation in collective action.

Various writers have described the declining influence of class-based identities in politics and their displacement by identity markers such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Fraser 1995; Melucci 1989; Moghadam 1994; Phillips 1995). Fraser (1995) noted that recognition struggles based on identity were replacing class struggles around interests, exploitation, and redistribution. Indeed, throughout the world, social movements have increasingly formed around identities other than class. This may be because politics or movements based on class identity in recent years proved to be incapable of radically transforming the economic landscape and challenging the exclusion of the poor at anything more than a very slow pace.

Alternatively, class turned out to be more transient than other identities, as many blue-collar workers aimed to change their – and their families' – fortunes for the better and thus at times sought to minimise class differences. Identities can be transitory such as class (though class markers may also become permanent in some cases), or based on more permanent components such as race, gender, and ethnicity (though these are still contingent) (Yuval-Davis 1994). As advocates of the women's and racial rights movements pointed out, even if it were possible, few women or blacks would be satisfied with either the erasure or the complete elimination of their difference, as had been the goal for many radical activists in regard to class difference (Phillips 1995). Hence the emergence of so-called new social movements that have sought to carve out a political identity that would lead to political and cultural transformations. Activists and critical theorists increasingly recognise that such identities (and the interests expressed by them) are inherently unstable and contingent (Escobar and Alvarez 1992).

Such a politics of identity is inextricably linked to the rise of the subject in feminist theory. Post-modern and post-structuralist theories have generated a shift from contestations over boundaries of structures and material realities to include contestations over meanings and

identities (White 1999; Whitworth 1994). Feminist theory approaches "identities [as] socially constructed as processes: they are embedded in and interact with historically specific social contexts composed of inter-subjective meaning systems, practices, institutional structures and material conditions" (Peterson 2003:112). As Moghadam asserts, "in a rejection of Marxian emphasis on economic determinants of identity formation, the new cultural analysis sees identities as historically and discursively constructed ... identities are seen as fluid and not primordial" (1994:5).

The implications of this shift are evident in the rejection among a growing number of feminists of universalising meta-narratives in favour of specificity and historical context, and greater attention to subjectivities and identity though not neglecting the influence of institutions and systems (Lim 1990; Marchand and Runyan 2000; Ong 1987, 1991; Pearson and Theobald 1998;Sylvester 1995, 2000). Peterson concludes that "the study of identities must be historical, contextual and dynamic: asking not only how identities are located in time and space but also how they are (re)produced, resisted and reconfigured" (2003:112). In short, feminism itself has during the past twenty years become increasingly focused on identity as constructed, contested, and contingent.

Hanna Papanek has argued that identity is determined "by a lifetime of experience", is the "product of individual learning", but also is "shaped and reshaped ... by external forces bent on their own agendas of building new solidarities, new group boundaries, and new political alliances" (1994:44). If we accept this characterisation, it becomes clear that not only is individual identity not stable but it is also not automatically the same as collective identities. Identity cannot be assumed to derive without deviation from a larger common notion of collectivity (Stryker 2000; Snow and McAdam 2000). Nor is the opposite the case: since identities vary in their salience and in their relevance to particular situations, construction and contestation of collective identity involve appeals to particular aspects of the individual identities of potential and actual members of a social movement (or any collective grouping for that matter).

Identity: Post-modern challenges

Collective identity is not always democratically determined or freely chosen and experienced. Rather, "the interests of the entire group in achieving conformity [of identity] will ... be invoked [to present a united front to others] to increase control over weaker or less 'obedient' members, decreasing the range of choices for individuals" (Papanek 1994:45). This means in practice that those who form part of a minority or of multiple minority groups may feel the need to make difficult decisions about which identity/ies they prioritise and act upon, since "differences are always contextual and relational" (Moore 2000:1130). Management of the plurality of (differently felt) identities within a group or movement has repercussions for women, as differences are never singularly defined.

Indonesian history also reminds us that identity is not always freely chosen or acted upon, but instead can be legitimised or de-legitimised by dominant discourses in society (see also Zugman 2003). As will be discussed in Chapters Three and Seven, the New Order regime in Indonesia employed the power of hegemonic discourse in its attempts to gain full control over the labour movement after the late 1960s. In all political references, it gradually replaced the term *buruh*, which translates as 'worker' but with the connotation of blue-collar working class, with the more neutral term *pekerja* which encompasses blue- as well as white-collar workers. Since the mid-1990s, however, Indonesian workers have started to reclaim the term *buruh* and invest it with positive meanings more closely related to trade unionism (Ford 2000; Bourchier 1994). This example shows once more how collective identities are constructed and continually contested, in this case between workers, employers, and the state.

The recognition that collective identity is not always freely chosen also points to a theoretical obstacle exposed by post-modernist feminists. Feminists have clearly shown the workings of gender regimes, in other words, the ways in which discourses, institutions, and structures attempt to construct "women" in line with dominant visions of femininity and masculinity (Stivens and Sen 1998; Sylvester 1995, 2000; Frith 1999). Such contestations over definitions and over gender regimes have real consequences since regimes of accumulation involve "proper definitions of womanhood and manhood that distribute privilege" and power (Pruegl 1999:198). But through what processes are women workers

constructed as a group by others such as employers, government, male workers, and researchers, or do women workers construct themselves as a group? Munck (2000b) warns us that increasingly globalised circumstances of workers do not guarantee the emergence of similarly disposed classes of workers. In the same way, the fact that millions of women workers around the world share exploitative working conditions does not automatically lead them to establish groups or organisations, whether as women or as workers.

Post-modern feminists have argued that women do not necessarily form a predetermined and natural constituency and that highlighting gender differences (taken as male-female differences) may obscure differences between women (Goetz 1991; Hirshman 1995; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Mohanty 1988, 1991; Ong 1991; Pearson and Jackson 1998; Sylvester 1995, 2000; White 1999). Social movement theory has similarly encountered this problem of defining what is collective action and who is involved in it. As Jelin writes:

> It is the researcher who proposes the reading of a set of practices as a social movement ... Social movements are objects constructed by the researcher which do not necessarily coincide with the empirical form of collective action. Seen from the outside, they may present a certain degree of unity, but internally they are always heterogeneous, diverse (1986:22) (quoted in Escobar and Alvarez 1992:6).

While outsiders might easily regard such entities as women's groups, what do these people call themselves and their groups? Differences among women are arguably as large as differences between men and women: "just as 'Western women' or 'white women' cannot be defined as coherent interest groups, 'third world women' also do not constitute any automatic unitary group" (Mohanty 1991:6-7). Sylvester remarks that "'women' is an indeterminate subject status and a continually 'becoming' identity rather than the realm of the given and fixed that many of us, including some feminists, think it is" (2000:24). Her reading of 'women' as an uncertain subject status that is 'filled' by various regimes of truth operating simultaneously suggests that gender identities can have many different meanings that defy easy and singular categorisation. Sylvester argues that "if gender is a regime-shaped construction, then it is sensible to view ... women as 'women', that is, as bearers of an unsettled, unfixed and indeterminate subject status that the people thus labelled may or may not embrace" (1995:184). The question therefore is not only why and how are women workers motivated to form groups to undertake collective action, but also how can we

speak about groups of women workers without validating essentialist and universalising identities.

Rai illustrates the indeterminate nature of women as a group in her discussion of quota politics in India. She quotes opponents of the passage of a Bill for quotas for women in Parliament as saying that the Bill would represent "the creation of a new constituency which is not defined by social or economic criteria, strictly speaking, and whose characteristics are, in fact, totally unknown – even the representatives of this [reserved] constituency would be unable to say which it is that women stand for and men don't" (Rai 2002a:172).[1] Indeed, women are not a unitary or static category but in reality experience fragmentation and tensions as a group, and gender differences are by definition culturally determined and variable.

It is not the intention of this chapter to reiterate or attempt to resolve feminist dilemmas of how to talk of women as a group while avoiding totalising assumptions and the pitfalls of essentialism, as such questions of epistemology have been discussed in detail elsewhere (for example Baden and Goetz 1998; Goetz 1991; Young 1995; Mohanty 1988, 1991). What is of concern here is that debates about the category of 'women' have left many feminists uncertain under what circumstances there can be a collective entity of women, and with what meanings and potential is it invested? Feminist activists question how they can make any general claims about women's groups or movements on the basis of some women's experiences of oppression or gender inequalities, if women as a category are at least in part constructed socially rather than naturally constituted. In the context of this thesis, if women workers base their collective action on politicised collective identity, how can they avoid the essentialism implied in claiming group difference?

Discussing this feminist dilemma, Iris Young proposes thinking of gender as "seriality" and of women "as a social collective" (1995:99). She defines a series as "a social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects around which their actions are oriented or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of the others" (1995:110). She considers gender as seriality in the sense that:

> In everyday life we often experience ourselves and others impersonally, as participating in amorphous collectives defined by routine practices and habits. The unity of the series derives from the way that individuals pursue their own individual ends with respect to the same objects conditioned by a continuous material environment, in response to structures that have been created by the unintended collective result of past actions (1995:110).

Young concludes that individuals are agents but that they act in the context of being part of a social collective "whose structure constitutes them with certain limits and constraints" (1995:111) but does not define their identity "in the sense of forming his or her individual purposes, projects and sense of self in relation to others" (1995:113). Thus, the series 'women' "is a passive unity, one that does not arise from the individuals called women but rather positions them through the material organization of social relations as enabled and constrained by the structural relations of enforced heterosexuality and the sexual division of labor" (1995:119).

In this conceptualisation, seriality is different from being part of a group, as seriality offers a passive unity in a collective that does not imply shared attributes or intentions. Group membership, in contrast, refers to an internalised identity that is expressed through "self-conscious bonds of solidarity" (Young 1995:113). A simplistic interpretation of this distinction between seriality and group would imply that some women may experience their gender as a (background) constraint they have in common with other women but without involving common attributes. Other women, however, may feel that common gender attributes are constitutive of their identity, resulting in feelings of recognition of membership in a collective and identification with it. Through this distinction, Young attempts to overcome the problems of ascribing essentialist attributes to the category 'women' without speaking of oppression and therefore perpetuating exclusions, or of not being able to say anything about women's attributes because of the diversity of women's lived experiences.

Multiple and contingent identities

What do post-modern feminist dissections of women as a group mean for the study of women workers mobilising in developing economies? How can Young's analysis of gender as seriality help us understand collective mobilising efforts by women workers? Women's location in society and the household, as well as in the economic and political environment,

deeply influences their individual experiences of work, but it is increasingly clear that this location is in turn also shaped by women themselves (Lim 1990; Pearson 1998; Razavi 1999). Razavi criticises "structuralist accounts ... [that] rendered women workers 'faceless and voiceless' and attributed much more personality and animation to capital than to the women it exploits" (1999:676).

Spivak's (1988) characterisation of the exploited Asian factory woman worker as the "paradigmatic subject" of the international division of labour, has gradually been replaced with a more nuanced and balanced portrayal of women as being at times victims and at other times agents: "Without women's own needs, values and worries, the global assembly line would grind to a halt" (Enloe 1990:16-7). If feminists formerly debated whether women's inclusion into the industrial workforce led to exploitation or liberation, now many pose the question, *which* women benefit from *what type* of employment and under what conditions. A wide variety of identity-defining factors and processes come into play in answering this question, as they do similarly in understanding women workers' collective action. As Young argues, "no individual woman's identity ... will escape the markings of gender, but how gender marks her life is her own" (1995:120).

Feminist analyses have made abundantly clear that women are resisting domination and exploitation on multiple fronts simultaneously, rather than concentrating exclusively on particular domains such as the state or the market. The "multiplicity of subject positions that women are occupying as they negotiate within and resist [global and local] restructuring" (Runyan and Marchand 2000:228) may lead them to invoke a variety of (shifting) identities in their collective action (see also Chhachhi and Pittin 1996 and Enloe 1990). The diversity and continuum of women's multiple identities indeed allow for a great variety in forms of organising and in group membership among women. Although men too have multiple subject positions that may generate diverse identities, they have generally found it easier to keep their identities separate due to the greater contrasts between their public roles as workers/citizens and their private roles as family members. The overwhelmingly male-oriented definition of formal work, the workplace, and the paid worker largely account for this difference.

But while feminists emphasise that identity is constituted by and at the same time constitutive of culturally and historically specific gender regimes, gender does not operate independently of other cleavages of power in society. As Zugman asserts with reference to women workers in Mexican-American border towns, "although the notion of multiple identities is useful for examining [women workers'] consciousness, it does not explain differences stemming from structural inequality ... in the subject formation of the women" (2003:160). Alvarez in her study of women's movements in Brazil calls attention to the need to examine political systems, organisational dynamics as well as cultural context at specific historical moments, to understand how social movements articulate and represent women's interests, and with what outcomes. She argues that "the competing class and gender ideologies and discursive practices prevailing at specific historical conjunctures have been shown to be the key to how gender-based claims are couched and to whether, when, where, and how they are channelled into the political system" (1990:265).

For many women workers, gender is intimately linked to production processes and relations in workplaces: "women's strategies as workers are a response not only to forms of labor control but also to gender-related domination" (Smyth and Grijns 1997:16). Writing on women workers in southern China, Ching Kwan Lee (1998) shows how women workers negotiate and thus help shape their conditions of work. At times, they may reproduce and manipulate gender inequality and stereotypes for their own benefit. Because they were social constructions that were contested and invested with different meanings by workers and managers, production processes in Lee's research entrenched existing gender inequalities but at the same time offered opportunities for women to contest and participate in the restructuring of gender relations and gender identity at local level. Thus, identity construction is a reflexive process that, in the case of women workers, does not revolve exclusively around gender regimes but also incorporates the processes by which people are made into workers and included or excluded as citizens.

Freeman's study of women in the off-shore informatics industry in Barbados (1998) provides another useful example of this reflexive process of identity construction. Recent attempts by women in this occupation to redefine their personal and collective identity as middle-class, pink-collar workers have specifically precluded unionisation or any other form of organising around a worker identity. Freeman asserts that trade unions in Barbados

are still strongly linked – both conceptually and physically – to a subjectively defined, masculine working class identity (see also Lawrence 1994; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994). Rather than assuming that women workers automatically form part of a labour movement based on a rigidly defined membership in working class structures, her study emphasises the fluid nature of women's identities and affiliations and their partial constitution through processes of labour regulation and labour control. It is therefore essential to map the place and role of identity in mobilising efforts by women workers.

Whether women experience gender as seriality or perceive a common group identity with other women is contingent rather than pre-determined. This has consequences as well for women's movements: "Increasingly, the feminist movement is being fragmented in a *multiplicity of feminist identities* that constitute the primary definition for many feminists" (Castells 1997:19; emphasis in original).[2] As discussed in Chapter One, at times these multiple (and perhaps competing) identities hinder collective action among women through the absence of a common identity, necessitating efforts to build bridges between different backgrounds and different work experiences, and to construct common histories and purpose. Wieringa similarly points out:

> [Women's movements] are composed of social actors who ... assert their agency in reflecting upon their experiences of oppression and constructing their identities. Not all aspects of their identities will be constituted by elements of the movement; other power relations will intersect with the collective will, sometimes causing ambiguities and contradictions, at other times strengthening each other (1995:7).

Castells argues with respect to feminist movements that "the self-construction of identity is not the expression of an essence, but a power stake through which women as they are mobilize for women as they want to be" (1997:200). In other words, collective identity is constructed, as social movement theorists have argued, through feelings of common purpose and at the intersections of competing and contradictory identities whose common attributes are politicised. Castells makes the useful distinction between three forms of identity building:

> Legitimizing identity: introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination [...]; resistance identity: generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival ... [and] project identity: when social actors [...] build a

> new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure (1997:8).

The women workers studied in this thesis are mostly involved in constructing a resistance identity, though a small minority of union women (what Young (1995) calls a "proto-group") have started to contest dominant identities and construct alternative or project identities. The process of construction of such alternative identities through collective struggle requires the creation and cultivation of feelings of solidarity and common purpose and meaning. Insofar as groups are socially constructed based on deliberate appeals to particular common identities, social movement theory is helpful in understanding the role of identity in collective action.

Identities, recognition, and representation

So far, this chapter has argued that women workers mobilise collectively on the basis of multiple and sometimes competing identities. These identities are to varying degrees shaped by gender relations and regimes. Gender identity may not always be sufficiently felt to become the (primary) basis for collective action. Following Young's conceptualisation of gender as seriality, mobilisation by women workers can be recognised as constituting a group of *women* if these women workers have deliberately formed bonds of solidarity with other women by politicising their common gender attributes. Women may use common experiences with women as a starting point in order to stimulate solidarity and feelings of common identification. By so doing they invoke women as a group characterised by chosen membership. Such politicisation of gender attributes does, however, not necessarily involve explicit challenges to dominant/hegemonic gender identity. Other women, in contrast, may refuse to valorise gender identity as the primary means of mobilisation, either because gender identity is not meaningful for their movement members or because they want to distance themselves from a hegemonic gender identity that they feel unable to challenge.

Whether they invoke women as a group with common attributes or mobilise through other identities (considering gender as seriality), women forming collective movements with other women will often struggle not only for redistribution of resources and power but also for recognition "as a distinct and legitimate social group" and "for citizen inclusion and political voice" (Phillips 2003:264). Those involved in collective mobilising and organising

may have short-term objectives but indirectly they often make claims for political agency and the right to participate as equals in society. Phillips argues that:

> Self-organisation emerges as a central theme – people shaking off external perceptions of what they are or ought to be and establishing their right to define themselves – and the major claim throughout is that neither the injustices they experience nor their most likely solutions can be adequately grasped without the group's full involvement (2003:265).

While this clearly does not hold for all collective action by women workers, both Phillips and Fraser (2003) contend that it is difficult to separate struggles over political voice from those that "challenge injustices in the distribution of resources and power" (Phillips 2003:270) given that the former often result in the latter whether intentionally or not. For each movement made up of women, the question therefore may be asked, why do they value or how do they justify recognition as a group?

Some feminists have argued that women have special interests, distinct from men, due to women's essentially different nature and the characteristics that they share as a group (Diamond and Hartsock 1981; Sapiro 1981; Gilligan 1982; Daly 1978). Insofar as such characteristics arise out of women's different positions and responsibilities in society, say, as mothers and the majority of those responsible for reproductive work, many feminists agree that women do have special interests (Sapiro 1981; Jonasdottir 1988). Sapiro supports the view that "regardless of their relative concern with [women's] issues, women have a 'special' interest, or a particular (potential) viewpoint from which their positions or preferences might be derived" (1981:165). It is not the aim of this section to argue whether or not women have 'special' (whether innate or derived) interests. Rather, it is concerned with the reasoning used by these and other feminists to argue for the existence of women's interests and with what this reasoning might mean for Third World women workers in their quest for recognition and representation.

In order to sidestep the question whether and how interests can be known objectively, and what such interests might be for women, Jonasdottir approaches women's interests from a different entry-point. She questions whether all women can be said to have common interests, regardless of their different subject positions in society. Are women's interests based on their roles and responsibilities in society or on the fact of differences between

women and men? Jonasdottir proposes recognising the double meaning of representation of interests. On the one hand, she identifies the "form aspect" of interests, in the sense of demanding to 'be among' those who make decisions on public policy and participate in such debates. On the other hand, this representational aspect is complemented by the "content or result aspect" which refers to the satisfaction of ever-changing desires and needs of a particular group of people who want to give active meaning to their 'being among' decision-makers. This latter concept remains an open question in the sense that desires and needs are multifaceted and linked to multiple subject positions in society (Jonasdottir 1988:41). Such needs may be easily recognised as feminist issues but may equally refer to the fulfilment of traditional roles or be related to right-wing movements.

Jonasdottir acknowledges that public policy making is not necessarily fully democratic in practice even if all citizens participate through voting: "the fact that women vote in elections as much as men do does not guarantee representation for women as women – that is, as gendered persons ... the active presence and positions within the 'factory' of politics should be what counts as representation" (1988:41; see also Phillips 1995 on formal versus substantive equality). Aside from the imperfections of democratic systems, however, there is a second issue embedded in this framework on which the remainder of this section will focus in the context of developing countries. If Jonasdottir's reasoning is followed through, it becomes clear that women have interests in the sense of wanting to claim a presence in the political sphere.

Ideally speaking, all women can claim a voice and active participation in a democratic political system on the basis of their citizenship which implies their legal individual right to equality and equal treatment. This is the Western European context in which Jonasdottir situates her discussion of interests[3]. At the same time, however, Jonasdottir holds that women's interests – in the sense of giving expression to values – emerge from their different positions, different responsibilities, and different activities in life. Then women could potentially also claim to represent their interests or have their interests represented for them on the basis of sexual difference. Thus, there are two grounds on which women can give meaning to their demand to 'be among' those who discuss and control public affairs: a justice argument and an argument that calls for women's potentially different perspectives and needs to be heard.

Jonasdottir's theory of interests has been restated and further developed by Anne Phillips in her work on 'politics of presence' (1995). While this chapter cannot do full justice to the comprehensive scope of her ideas, it will focus on her discussion of representation based on gender, race, or ethnicity. In brief, Phillips makes the case for a politics of presence rather than a politics based on the particular ideas that individuals bring to politics. Of the four possible arguments she presents, the role model function or the "importance of symbolic representation" (1995:25) of a woman or person of colour counts least for her, as this has no implications for our thinking about representative democracy. She puts more emphasis on the justice argument (referred to as the "normative" argument by Lovenduski (2000)) which would see representative bodies better reflect the people they are meant to represent and serve, thus leading to calls for 50 percent women in parliament and proportional representation of ethnic and racial minorities. However, without a strong case for structural exclusion of these groups, this argument would be open to objections that the current under-representation of these groups is due to 'natural' circumstances such as the sexual division of labour, or that representation should be extended to a potentially endless variety of groups (as noted by Rai (2002a) in relation to the quota debate in Indian parliament).

Phillips' third argument ("pragmatic" according to Lovenduski), that is "the need for more vigorous advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged groups" (1995:25), can potentially be taken care of by "measures to ensure the proportional representation of political ideals" (1995:48). This leaves the fourth argument, based on difference: that the continued exclusion of particular groups from representation results in issues and perspectives remaining unaddressed and concerns denied:

> If we take the preferences that are expressed through the mechanism of the vote as the final word on what governments should or should not do, we may be condemning large sections of the community to persistently unjust conditions. It is no real justification for this to say that it is what people said they wanted (1995:44-5).

Phillips concludes that even though women's interests cannot be known in advance and in many cases their interests will overlap with those of other groups, it is precisely because interests are not equal to political ideas but instead attached to particular experiences that women need to represent their own interests. Phillips does not assume that women's

experiences will be different from men's in particular ways or that they led to changes in political processes or policy outcomes.[4] But because interests are gendered and because women's interests are not transparent or can be known objectively, they must be represented by women (1995:66-71).

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, group interests are deliberated and articulated by groups that are an expression of collective identity. Thus, in representing their interests women engage in relational politics in which the identity around which they mobilise collectively enables an expression of their interests and claims. When women actively unite as women with shared gender attributes, they may base their claims for representation on the gendered condition they share, that is, on the different needs they put forward as women (in relation to other women, to men, or to other groups). But even when women do not activate their gender identity in collective action and instead experience gender as seriality (identifying for example as workers), they may still claim recognition and representation, based on their right "to be among" in decision-making. The identities around which women mobilise and organise collectively may thus be indicative of the particular politics through which they claim representation.

According to Phillips (2003), however, the key to avoiding the validation of essentialist identities as an unintended side-effect of such efforts towards recognition is to understand the motivation of group members for recognition. Phillips therefore warns that "the object is not so much the recognition of the group as of equal worth, but the recognition of group specificity *in order* ... to challenge [an injustice]" (2003:266). Rather than the validity of the group identity, it is the injustices to which the group is subjected because of the values attached to their difference that is to become the focus of the collective action. In this way, collective action does not need to revolve around differences that are naturalised or universalised, and "recognition then appears as a means to further ends rather than an end in itself" (Phillips 2003:266).

Recognition struggles by women workers

Phillips argues that political representation is substantially different from participation in employment or entry into educational institutions where similar arguments for women's

inclusion have been made: "while men have no 'right' to monopolize political office, there is something rather unsatisfying in basing women's claim to political equality on an equal right to an interesting job" (1995:65). But while not all reasons for women's inclusion in employment or education are equally *strong* or convincing when it comes to political representation, Phillips' justifications for women's representation as women in politics are equally *valid* in other areas where members of a collective group elect representatives who are expected to take decisions and formulate policies based on the presumed interests of all members. Whether this collective group is a nation-state or a trade union or a women workers' organisation does not make a difference: in each case, rather than "an objectively defined set of interests (which just needed more vigorous pursuit)" what counts is "a more exploratory notion of possibilities so far silenced and ideas one had to struggle to express" (Phillips 1995:70).

Phillips' fourth argument of the transformative potential of opening up political spaces to previously unrepresented groups is similar to Jonasdottir's argument of 'content', and is of particular importance for women in labour movements in developing countries. In many societies, there is little basis of participatory democratic governance or guarantees of substantive equality on which to claim active political participation (the so-called 'form aspect'). In the formal sense of the word Indonesia and Thailand are both democracies which guarantee (formal) equality before the law through their constitutions, while Indonesia has instituted a voluntary quota for women in political parties (see Chapter Seven). Nevertheless, most observers agree that inequality – both in law and in practice – continues to affect large and diverse groups such as most women, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, or people living in poverty (Hewison 1997; Pasuk and Baker 2000; Lambert 1997; Robinson and Bessell 2002; see also Chapters Three and Four). Electoral systems have long benefited a small minority of rich and powerful, who are mostly men (Bessell 2004 on Indonesia).[5] Manifestations of inequality – or conversely the inability to claim substantive equality – cause many groups of women to suffer inadequate participation and representation in formal politics as well as other political arenas. Women not only experience numerical under-representation in most forms of politics but also find that their needs and desires are poorly reflected in public affairs, leading some to join struggles for recognition as (part of) distinct groups.

This thesis suggests that, in some cases where women find it difficult to employ arguments of formal legal equality (as is common in developing countries), they may instead find it expedient to justify their demands for representation on the basis of the 'content aspect'. This in practice would mean that women claim a voice using their potentially different gender interests and needs as their starting points. Jonasdottir alludes to this possibility when she states that women's right to vote is justified on the basis of the "continual possibility" of women's needs and attitudes differing from men's (1988:53). This interplay between difference and equality is reminiscent of the "paradox" of feminism, according to Joan Scott:

> Feminism was a protest against women's political exclusion: its goal was to eliminate "sexual difference" in politics, but it had to make its claims on behalf of "women" (who were discursively produced through "sexual difference"). To the extent that it acted for "women," feminism produced the "sexual difference" it sought to eliminate. This paradox – the need to both accept *and* to refuse "sexual difference" – was the constitutive condition of feminism as a political movement through its long history (1996:3-4).

This paradox potentially gives rise to two different types of women's movements: "[those] which premise their strategic visions on the minimisation of difference between the sexes, and those which argue for the enhancement of women's place in society through an appreciation of the differences between the sexes" (Molyneux 1998:80). Phillips also acknowledges this possibility, stating that "denial of difference can make it difficult to argue for special treatment for groups who are unequally positioned in the social hierarchy" (1995:9; see also Young 1990). In practice, women (workers) usually do not rigidly decide to claim either equality or difference as if these are fixed polarities, but rather deal creatively with the tensions between these two choices by strategically adjusting their arguments depending on the audience.

Examining identity from the angle of recognition and representation can help to explain why women at times publicly proclaim interests that may appear to outsiders to be at odds with their attempts at equal treatment. For example, Chapter Six will recount how many Thai women union leaders mobilise collectively for women's inclusion into trade union leadership on the basis of their unique and different abilities from men which can serve as an example for other women and men. In Indonesia, women union activists have clamoured for rights such as maternity and menstruation leave, as entry-points in order to call attention

to women workers' rights more generally. Rather than claiming to 'be among' because they are citizens (formal equality or justice arguments), these women workers take a different approach; they emphasise their sexual difference from men in the hope that this will gain them a voice in politics where they can then promote gender equality (though not sameness). In Phillips' (1995) terms, they claim a politics of presence (as women who are different from men) over a politics of ideas (the content of their interests which is as yet unknown). The arguments made in such struggles for recognition will impact also on the struggles for redistribution that often result from them.

A politics of presence does not exclude a politics of ideas, and women frequently use the former as a means to reach and legitimise the latter. The importance of using one as a bridge to the other is implied in the risks attached to using a politics of presence exclusively. With regard to women politicians in Norway, Skjeie writes:

> A mandate of 'difference' is now attached to women politicians. It has been used by women themselves to get inside the power institutions. It is recognized by party leaderships, both men and women, as a relevant political mandate. It is the basis for new expectations as presently stated from outside the power institutions. Their aim being persuasion, arguments on the political relevance of difference, however, remain largely unspecified. They do not clarify exactly which values or priorities will form the basis for a transformation of public policies. Neither do they outline how such a transformation will proceed. They have been powerful tools of inclusion but have also blurred distinctions among women in government. First arguments of difference undercommunicate the impact of primary political identifications ... Second they do not acknowledge individual variations in the degree to which women politicians themselves agree that they have a women's mandate to fulfill (1991:134).

Similarly, as Chapters Six and Seven will show, when Indonesian and Thai union women have used a mandate of difference to gain positions of influence, there has been little talk about its practical ramifications and the differences between women that it obscures. This implies that recognition of group differences can in certain instances become an end in itself rather than a means to eradicate injustices experienced by the group as a whole.

Furthermore, in relation to union women, a politics of presence premised on difference as 'otherness' frequently implies the notion that it is women workers who have to assimilate, rather than trade unions that have to broaden their membership and acknowledge women workers' particular demands and needs as women (cf. Rai 2002b:163). As Franzway writes,

"the organisation of unionism is designed to defend workers against employers and resists the inclusion of women *qua* women. The question which follows is, how women engage in class conflict, as women, if their difference as women is denied through a gender-blind discourse of worker solidarity?" (1997:132). Women workers may thus have to privilege their identity as *workers* in order to be included into the labour movement, but at the same time may have to base claims to political participation on being recognised as *women* in order to make any particularistic demands heard.[6]

Thus, diverse interpretations are possible when women workers' groups argue for inclusion and representation based on claims that women workers' gender identity is relevant to the operations of the group and its representation of members. Such arguments may indicate feminist consciousness but may also show a 'tactical essentialism' that makes use of the ever-changing societal perceptions of women's identities to challenge hegemonic identities of workers, mothers, or women. This implies the necessity of understanding seemingly contradictory demands and struggles by women workers as diverse strategies to challenge mechanisms of exclusion and as fluid expressions of a variety of visions and constructions of women workers' identities.

Thus, we can distinguish between identities that lead women workers to struggle on the basis of their formal right to have a voice and be represented by women, and those identities that encourage collective mobilisation and demands for representation (and implicitly for implementation of their demands) based on difference (gender and otherwise). This distinction allows us to understand more clearly how union women use, conform to, or challenge dominant identities to construct and sustain feelings of a common purpose and solidarity in pursuit of collective action.

To sum up, where substantial gender inequalities persist, the 'content aspect' identified by Jonasdottir (1988) may at times be the most effective justification for women's representation. Where this occurs, this thesis argues that union women construct a common identity around which to mobilise women workers, an identity as women based on what may appear to be essentialist conceptions of women's (subjective) interests. In other cases, gender identity may not be experienced as meaningful by women workers. When union women then mobilise around workers' identities, they may nevertheless employ gender

interests in their efforts to build a common goal and purpose for their collective action. Thus, this thesis aims to demonstrate some of the different (and sometimes hybrid) strategies among union women in Thailand and Indonesia to try to represent women workers' interests in and through labour movements.

Collective identity and alliances for transformation

If women workers' struggles for recognition and redistribution are constructed around and bound up in local and global gender regimes – and how these regimes construct and reproduce gender identities – this has important implications for the cohesion of collective identity in women workers' organisations. How much weight is attached to gender identity; how much it is privileged over other identities in mobilising efforts; and exactly whose interests are represented is dependent on the participants in a social movement (organisation) and the context in which they are operating. Because "group interests do not pre-exist, fully formed ... [but] have to be continuously constructed and reproduced" in particular contexts (Pringle and Watson 1992:229-30), differences must be negotiated by women from different backgrounds each time they come together in a social movement or a movement organisation.

Women construct an image of women's interests that may owe more to the needs and desires of some groups of women than to those of others.[7] For example, maternity leave is not an inherent interest for all women workers since not all women will want to become mothers or to return to their workplace after childbirth. Nor do demands for menstruation leave by women workers in Indonesia represent the interest of all women who work. In other words, when union women demand recognition of their potentially different interests as women, they construct a collective identity of women workers based on what are necessarily subjectively defined interests. This collective identity therefore includes some women and excludes others.

The consequences of such exclusions and the risks of validating essentialist identities are particularly evident in women workers' efforts to build solidarity through coalitions and networks.[8] In order to result in concrete changes to power relations in society, recognition and representation of a particular group's collective identity – "the politics of affirmation"

(Fraser 1995) – needs to be followed by redistribution in order to transcend the status quo. Such a redistribution of resources (both material and immaterial) is the aim of those women workers who through their organisations express demands that go beyond recognition of their shared disadvantages. Redistribution, however, requires a large-scale movement that can mobilise large numbers of supporters, necessitating coalitions and networking.

Some feminists locate the possibility for coalitions and other forms of cooperation among women in their potential for common opposition to oppression. Jill Krause, for example, argues that "what all feminists share is a conviction that women can become a strategic group when they enter into a common struggle against class, race and gender hierarchies" (1996:234). Given the plurality within women's movements as well as within feminism, however, it may not be the differences between men and women, but those among women that make such a common struggle difficult to locate (Molyneux 1998:83). In acknowledging the diversity among women, women workers may as a result find insufficient common ground to organise collectively with other women (see also Franzway 1997; Perry 1996). For example, the recognition of their exclusion as women *workers* may in some instances take precedence over the urgency of redistribution of resources and power to *all women*. In other words, in some situations women's position in a sub-group (workers) may have greater or lesser bearing on their struggles for empowerment than the general position of women in social and economic systems (see also Yuval-Davis 1994 and Rai 2002b). Therefore the experiences or strategies that will lead to the development of solidarity and the pursuit of coalitions and networks should be treated as historically and geographically specific and shaped by differences between women.

In response to these questions of strategy and prioritisation, Goetz suggests that "successful coalitions are built upon both the strength of numbers – where one of the potential strengths of women has always resided – and on the fact that members always have some home beyond the coalition from which to draw self-affirming sustenance" (1991:150). The importance of identity for mobilisation lies in the local and transnational alliances that particular identities facilitate among different groups. As Theobald has argued with respect to women workers in northern Thailand, "in order to meet the challenge of better working conditions in the electronics industry, there is a need to have a greater understanding of workers' identities, experiences and responsibilities; [and] develop structures that facilitate

the growth of participatory alliances between different groups at national and international levels" (2002:150).

Alliances between women's or feminist groups and other social movements are all the more important, given the changing role of the state in the context of globalisation: "Increasingly, feminists are concerned that in succeeding in the battle for recognition of gender inequalities, feminist social movements are losing the struggle for redistribution of power relations" (Rai 2002b:119). Thus, identity not only counts in the mobilisation of women workers but also in the degree of compatibility and commonality in experience that they may find with other women, and the likelihood of building alliances with those women.

Such alliances would most likely revolve around particular, short-term struggles for recognition (as women or otherwise) and/or redistribution, in which genuine dialogue can lead groups of women to bridge or put aside temporarily differences between women in the interest of constructing solidarity and a shared purpose. Chapters Six and Seven will explore whether and under what circumstances such coalitions have emerged in Thailand and Indonesia. With reference to women workers, Mohanty suggests that the basis for such dialogue can be laid by looking towards the "social location of particular women as workers" and finding in it "the basis for common interests and potential solidarities across national borders" (1997:5). She argues "for a notion of political solidarity and common interests, defined as a community or collectivity among women workers across class, race, and national boundaries which is based on shared material interests and identity and common ways of reading the world" (1997:8). She thus refers to an interconnectedness of women workers on the basis of the gendered ideological construction of women's work as seen through the viewpoint of history and social location.

What may be most important (in a practical sense) in Mohanty's argument is the process of uncovering such interconnectedness. In the process of deliberating their commonalities, women workers and other groups (of women and others) may become aware of both their mutual need for recognition as political actors, and their need for a redistribution of resources that enables them to participate in politics in meaningful and potentially transformative ways (Rai 2002:193-5). Such deliberation may enable women workers and other marginalised groups to see the interlinked nature of their struggles. Where it is based

on respect for multiple differences, it can open up space for women workers to mobilise other women workers through reference to identity but also to form alliances without claiming or validating an essentialised identity.

Conclusion

The main question addressed throughout this chapter has been how identity and interest relate to efforts by women workers in developing countries to mobilise for collective action. First, it has been argued in line with much feminist theory that interests are not easily read as indicators of how and why women workers mobilise, as interests are not pre-determined and do not derive automatically and unproblematically from identities and experiences. When instead looking towards identity as the motivating factor for women workers' engagement in struggles for recognition and redistribution, this chapter has addressed post-modern (and other) feminist doubts about speaking about women as a group without validating essentialist identities. Young's concept of gender as seriality was found to be useful in distinguishing between gender as passive experience of constraints and gender as politicised identity through which collective movement (such as feminist action) occurs. Thus, collective action may entail conforming to and/or contesting hegemonic or dominant gender identities.

More specifically, this chapter argued that the discursive practices of gender and class in particular geographical and historical contexts constitute gender and economic regimes that shape the identities through which women workers organise in recognition struggles. Women workers take part in shaping these regimes through their participation in them and their resistance, but simultaneously experience the constraints and possibilities that flow from them. In response, the identities on which women workers build their collective action at times use hegemonic (and perhaps essentialised) identities, but at other times contest and reinvent them.

Jonasdottir's distinction between the form and content aspects of arguments for representation allowed for greater clarity with regard to the strategic use of sexual difference in recognition struggles. Where arguments of formal legal equality are lacking, women workers may mobilise around a common gender identity based on gender

differences. In doing so, they recognise that common attributes as women can be activated and politicised to make claims for recognition and representation. Yet, where social, racial, economic, or other differences between women cannot be bridged through reference to a common gender identity, women workers may find that their identity as workers is more meaningful and more effectively articulated as the basis for collective action. Because collective action involves the deliberate construction of common identities among members of a collective, women workers may thus not valorise gender identity as the most effective common attribute leading to solidarity.

This implies that the study of women workers' groups must pay particular attention to the use of gender identity to understand and interpret seemingly contradictory claims and demands by such groups. Because arguments for recognition of gender difference (in Phillips' words 'a politics of presence') carry the risk of validating essentialist identities, this chapter also argues for the necessity of coalitions and alliances with other groups and movements. Through deliberation of commonalities and respect for multiple differences, such alliances can transcend essentialist implications in the strategic use of gender (and other) differences.

Chapters Six and Seven put these arguments to the test by examining in detail to what extent and how women workers in Thailand and Indonesia have invoked identities as women, as workers, as women workers, or any other variations to mobilise for collective action. Those chapters will examine how gender and worker identities shape the ways in which union women construct and name interests in collective terms. Given the contingent nature of such efforts at collective action, the next two chapters will sketch a brief background of Thailand and Indonesia, focusing on economic and political developments of the past twenty-five years and their impact on women workers' ability to mobilise and organise collectively. Chapter Five in turn will discuss how these developments have shaped the participation and roles of women in trade unions.

[1] The question of a quota for women's representation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven in relation to Indonesian women workers.

[2] Castells cautions that identity must be distinguished from roles and role-sets. Roles "are defined by norms structured by the institutions and organizations of society" whereas identities "are sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through a process of individuation" (Castells 1997:7). In other words, "identities organize the meaning while roles organize the functions" (Castells 1997:7).

[3] In this respect, Jonasdottir says that "in Western capitalist societies with their liberal democratic states, neither sex/gender groups nor sexuality, as a field of activities, is openly acknowledged as a politically relevant social basis for competing interests. Even many women's organizations are hesitant or unwilling to see society in these terms, and mainstream political science reflects this situation by being silent" (1988:44). Thus, she questions the exclusive reliance on the democratic ideal of equality and equal representation as a justification for women's participation.

[4] For Scott (1992), experience must be located in subject positioning that is constituted discursively at particular historical moments. While this thesis does not pursue the meaning of experience through discourse analysis, it does heed Scott's call for "a way of changing the focus and philosophy of our history, from one bent on naturalizing 'experience' through a belief in the unmediated relationship between words and things, to one that takes all categories of analysis as contextual, contested, and contingent" (1992:36). Scott's assertion that "what counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straight-forward; it is always contested, always therefore political" (1992:36-7), strengthens the call for women to represent their own diverse interests, given that women's experiences have historically been discounted and interpreted by men.

[5] Hewison (2001) suggests that although the capitalist class in Thailand is not united and is instead made up of different sections, it is supported by (and in many instances forms part of) the ruling class.

[6] Phillips warns that "focusing on the differences between women and men can lend itself to a sentimentalized vision of women's place or role – and in the sentimentalized vision, women are usually subordinated" (1995:11). The discursive emphasis on difference or equality also allows men to remain the standard against which women can be judged. Thus, as White warns, "the repeated emphasis on the differences of women to men ... fails to question how ideas of the 'general' interest by class or ethnicity may be implicitly male gendered or the way in which these interests are interrelated" (1999:131). However, given the importance of acknowledging and addressing points of vulnerability or special interests, Rhode (1992) advises assessing in each context how sex-linked attributes are interpreted and what gender-specific advantages and disadvantages result from such attributes.

[7] Both Jonasdottir and Molyneux treat needs as distinct from interests, in that needs can be met without the people or groups concerned participating in public policy (which for Jonasdottir is an essential aspect of interests). Also, needs can be met 'from above' whereas the participatory aspect of interests requires a view 'from below'. Molyneux adds that "interests are conceptually different from needs, in that the former are more clearly intentional, belong within a political vocabulary, and are the product of a process of reasoning which assumes instrumental agency" (1998:79).

[8] For a critical discussion regarding engagement by women's movements and groups with state institutions and global economic institutions, and on the costs and risks of such engagement, see Rai (2002b).

Chapter 3 - Labour markets and labour regulation in Thailand and Indonesia

Introduction

Any examination of the role of identity in women workers' efforts to mobilise and organise collectively requires analysis of the context in which they live and work, in particular the local structures of and attitudes to trade unions and work, especially women's work (Hess 1986; Beckwith 1998). Accounts of workers' organising in Southeast Asia can be divided into three broad areas that to some extent overlap with explanations sought for women's presumed lack of organising. One stream highlights economic and structural factors such as economic restructuring, globalisation and the uneven growth of capitalism in Southeast Asia (Frenkel 1993; Frenkel and Harrod 1995). Closely related is the second stream, which emphasises the role of the state and military, focusing on state structures and power struggles in and around the state (Hadiz 1997; Brown 2004; Kammen 1997). This literature largely corresponds to the political science school which focuses on political opportunities and the changing constellations of political and economic power within the state and its institutions. Lastly, religion, language, and culture have played an important role, according to Deyo (1989) and Koo (2001), whom in stressing these factors approach the grievance theory of social movement analysis.

Following the first of these approaches, this chapter aims to provide an analysis of labour markets and labour regulation in Thailand and Indonesia, with specific focus on economic factors influencing women workers' ability to mobilise and organise collectively. As patterns of economic development and industrial relations in Thailand and Indonesia have been described in great detail elsewhere (Brown 2004; Deyo 1989, 1997; Ford 1999, 2000; Hadiz 1997, 2000; Manning 1998), this chapter will limit itself to key features and events of the past twenty-five years and their effect on women workers' potential for collective organising. It will examine from a gender perspective several relevant political and economic aspects of labour regulation and will argue that these have constrained the ability

of workers in general and especially of women workers to build strong and effective workers' organisations.

Chapter Four will compare political structures and social movements in the two countries, with gender relations and regimes analysed in Chapter Five. Chapters Three to Five highlight from a gender perspective the similarities and differences between Thailand and Indonesia while stressing the different contexts in which women workers began to organise. This chapter starts with an introduction to political systems and their impact on labour regulation in the two countries. Following this is a comparison of economic developments in each country, highlighting recent changes to the industrial relations system as well as the effect of labour market dynamics on women workers. Finally, the chapter presents a comparative analysis of women's position in labour markets in Thailand and Indonesia. Each section discusses the two countries separately and is followed by a brief comparison and conclusion.

Political systems

What impact do political systems have on workers' ability to mobilise and organise collectively? Thailand and Indonesia have both experienced authoritarian regimes that through their repressive labour legislation have weakened trade unions. Both countries have also witnessed regime change to more democratic forms of governance, in Indonesia more recently than in Thailand. The following sections argue that political systems negatively affect workers' ability to form and join trade unions and other workers' organisations because of the nature of labour legislation and industrial relations, as well as the struggles in which the state has collaborated with employers to prevent workers from exercising their formal rights.

Thailand

Workers' freedom to organise and enjoy labour rights has frequently been limited throughout Thai history, usually in conjunction with military dictatorships concerned with political stability and economic growth. Most civilian regimes have also sought to downplay the political and popular influence of labour activists or to use it for their own

purposes. Although labour groups were actively involved in the 1932 popular uprising that would lead to the establishment of constitutional democracy in Thailand, labour was alternately repressed by military regimes or given limited political space by civilian rulers in the four decades after this important event in Thai history. The immediate post-war years, the late 1950s, and the mid-1970s were periods during which heavy-handed strategies of containment by authoritarian or military regimes were replaced by legal reforms by democratic regimes allowing some degree of freedom of association and collective bargaining. Subsequent authoritarian regimes (1976-1988 and 1991-1992) generally repealed or amended such legislation and reverted to interference in labour organisations by fostering rivalries, outlawing labour unions, intimidation, and murdering union activists (Brown 2004; Bundit 2004).

Yet, the changing fortunes of Thai labour are more complex than simple antagonism or variation between democratic and military rule with regards to freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively. Labour has at times acted as the scapegoat of conflicts between conservative bureaucratic and military interests on the one hand and progressive or liberal business elites on the other. For example, during and especially after the transition period towards parliamentary democracy (1988-1991) new politicians courted labour's votes while conservative elites sought to turn back the clock to an exclusionary labour regime (Brown 2004). This created opportunities for labour to utilise elite divisions and to push successfully for the introduction of social security and paid maternity leave.

More recently, the rise in 2001 of the business-centric Thaksin Shinawatra government appears to have led to a gradual but perceptible closing off of political space for civil society. The April 2004 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights presented to the Human Rights Commission criticised the government for increasing harassment of and the use of force against human rights defenders in areas such as the environment, minority rights, and migrant labour. According to the report, "officials tried to control NGOs' funding support, their freedom of association and used state security mechanisms to place them under surveillance and harass some of them" (*Bangkok Post* 14 April 2004). In addition, the spate of killings of local activists in 2003-2004 (detailed by the Thai National Human Rights Commission) and the subsequent lack of punishment of the perpetrators reflect a culture of intimidation by the government and/or its intermediaries towards their

critics. It is likely that such a culture of impunity constitutes a strong disincentive for workers to mobilise and organise. Given their vulnerability to sexual violence and law-enforcers' reluctance to respond to this, women workers might well experience these disincentives more strongly than men do.

As the state is not a unitary actor with fixed interests, the particular intersections of interests within it and between the urban elite, bureaucracy, business, military and other interest groups impact on labour's position in society and their ability to mobilise. Although workers in theory enjoy protection under the labour law, in practice the state colludes with employers and investors to make it difficult for workers to exercise their rights. Brown (2001) observes several weaknesses of the Thai trade union movement which he attributes in part to employers' strategies such as labour flexibilisation (especially short-term contracts), dismissal of those initiating trade unions, and avoiding unionisation by closing or moving the company and opening up elsewhere under a new name.

Various elements within the state share responsibility for such indirect repression through their "failure to close the many loopholes in the law, not enforcing employer compliance and a continuing refusal to ratify ILO [International Labour Organisation] conventions that cover workers' basic rights" (Brown 2001:129), while military interference through a 'divide and rule' attitude has further limited the possibilities for trade unions to take effective action (see also Napaporn 2002). Clearly, combined with growing unemployment since the late 1990s and the decline of traditional labour-intensive industries, these developments have made many workers – both men and women – fearful of losing their jobs and therefore reluctant to engage in trade unionism. Thus, the impact of political systems is best analysed in conjunction with economic-structural factors and in the context of defence of particular business interests.

In sum, the political space available to labour to organise and to formulate and project its demands, and workers' relationship with political elites – or perhaps rather their ability to manipulate this relationship – can at least partially explain past successes. It is important to keep in mind that both democratically elected administrations and military regimes may represent interests that are antagonistic to trade unions and other workers' organisations. Both have at various times constrained the ability of Thai workers to mobilise, through

repressive labour legislation, labour practices that primarily benefit employers, and/or political interference in trade unions. Nevertheless, the existence of legislation guaranteeing freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively, in contrast to other countries in the region, has at the same time given support to labour activists. In addition, in the context of democratisation, the passage of a new constitution in 1997 and the global and local spread of human rights vocabulary, (women) workers increasingly perceive the above-mentioned obstacles as social injustice. Hence, these constraints also provide powerful incentives for some (women) workers to defy the power of state officials, politicians, and employers through collective action. Thus, the political interests of the state have both positive and negative effects on women workers' propensity to organise collectively.

Indonesia

Unlike the messy chronology which characterises Thai political developments, Indonesia's political system was until 1998 defined by the relative stability resulting from the dominance for more than thirty years of Suharto, his powerful political party GOLKAR, and the military. During the Suharto era, independent labour organising was virtually impossible due to the existence of a single trade union federation with which all enterprise-based unions were forced to affiliate. As a consequence of this system and the domination of the union structure by GOLKAR personnel and supporters, political space for labour was extremely limited. The Indonesian regime at times acted according to political motives and at other times was pressed by economic imperatives to deny labour the chance to act collectively (Hadiz 1997). But the result in either case was to force labour activists to comply with the regime's policies and limiting ideology or take their operations overseas or underground.

As has been documented elsewhere (Hadiz 2001; Ford 2000, 2001; Quinn 2003), the changes in governance since 1998 have led to the ratification of the ILO Conventions on Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining, and subsequent adjustments to national labour legislation. However, while it allowed the nascent labour movement greater freedom through the loosening of regulations, the Indonesian state at the same time has not shown great interest in protecting labour through new regulations. For example, the Megawati administration (2001-2004) has responded to calls from business

elites for a tougher stance on workers' demands for minimum wage increases, mainly by providing exemptions and by frequently failing to enforce the minimum wage.[1] With a relatively weak system of law enforcement and the current prioritisation of national security and political stability over labour issues, the disregard by the state for labour appears likely to continue. For workers, this effectively implies the continuation of serious practical obstacles to collective organising such as the biased implementation of labour legislation (favouring employers), a shortage of funds and other support, and physical threats from thugs working for their employers.

Other legacies of the Suharto regime also continue to constrain workers in their attempts to defend their rights. The New Order regime not only did not countenance the emergence of a labour movement, but also was averse to opening up the political sphere to women and men outside the military, business, or religious elites. This sense of exclusion was heightened for middle-class and other working women. Saptari asserted that the New Order regime had, since the late 1980s, brought about for women a form of dependency "in formal political representation due to direct processes of exclusion or to the social and ideological constraints imposed on women's participation" (1995:169).

Only during the last ten years of the New Order regime did women enjoy increasing opportunities to engage in political life as a result of "a growing level of civilianisation, an increasingly politicised and divided elite, and the declining popularity of the regime" (McCormick 2003:1). Although a small number of female leaders emerged in the fields of politics and social activism, non-elite women stood very little any chance of becoming significant political actors at the regional or national level. Robison noted that "the middle classes have gained a political place but one within the structures of authoritarian corporatism, not liberal democracy, and to suit the agendas of capitalist oligarchies" (1998:74). This has limited men and women in their ability to gain experience in social activism.

With greater political freedoms as well as continuing contestations for power between military, business, and religious factions behind the scenes, Robison's characterisation of Indonesian political life now appears to some extent to be valid for most Indonesians, including workers. In terms of participation, only Indonesian men have progressed far

beyond the exclusionary tactics of the New Order regime. The 2004 elections in Indonesia showed that, even though voters now directly elect both the nation's president and representatives for local and national parliaments, much remains the same in terms of elite and patriarchal domination of formal political processes, especially in determining party candidate lists. This is particularly true for women whose representation in both local and national political structures remains very low (see Chapter Four). Thus, there have been very few women within the political establishment to whom women workers could turn for encouragement, influence, or information (with the exception of a handful of women activists in politics).

Greater political freedoms have not led to the expansion of the role of labour in politics either. Citing large-scale rural-to-urban migration and growth of employment in labour-intensive industries as factors stimulating union organising, Hadiz (1997) initially pointed to the emergence of a proletariat in Indonesia. He posited that this new labour force could expect long-term employment, has common experiences under structures of labour control and therefore would have an incentive to organise collectively. That this proletariat has not gained much political influence since the political reforms era is mainly the result of union fragmentation, unions' lack of experience in advocacy and lobbying, and the consequent lack of interest from political parties (which do not regard labour as a constituency worthy of attention) (Hadiz 2002). Parties claiming to represent workers performed poorly in both the 1999 and 2004 national parliamentary elections. This suggests that workers may not regard their status as workers as the most important consideration in their voting preferences, that workers' parties may not have sufficient experience and resources, or that workers do not trust political parties to represent their interests.

In sum, although the political and particularly the industrial relations systems in Indonesia have witnessed substantial changes since the start of Reformasi in 1998, at a practical level many of the obstacles to (women) workers' mobilisation and organisation remain the same. On a more positive note, the new freedom to organise through trade unions has led to renewed enthusiasm in trade unionism among some workers, while political reforms have brought about greater access to information and foreign funding for trade unions and other labour organisations. In conclusion, the legacy of the Suharto years continues to impact

negatively on collective activism by workers and by women in particular, but recent political reforms have given a new impetus to efforts to organise workers.

Comparison

Although both countries have experienced authoritarian regimes, the impact of these regimes on labour organising is not clear-cut. Repressive labour legislation, political interference and backing for employers (and the growing domestic capitalist class) characterise both the Suharto and successive Thai authoritarian regimes. In both countries, labour leaders have been intimidated, attacked and even murdered by shadowy forces working most likely for the government and/or employers. Equally, such repressive circumstances might give rise to resistance by workers and their organisations, albeit covertly.

Both Thailand and Indonesia currently recognise the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining (though not for public sector workers in Thailand), and legislation passed in recent years to strengthen these rights provides important opportunities for workers to mobilise and organise collectively. However, civilian regimes have also created serious obstacles to unionisation. While the political space for workers to put forward their demands has increased in recent years (especially in Indonesia since 1998), workers continue to have little access to formal politics, such as electoral and party politics. Union activists continue to be insufficiently protected from their employers, and practical obstacles to unionisation remain in many workplaces. The next section analyses in detail these barriers in relation to the formal rights offered to workers through labour legislation. At this point, it can be concluded that despite recent improvements, both countries still have a political environment that does not give both male and female workers the ability to mobilise and organise fully in movements and organisations. As Aspinall concludes, "Indonesia has entered a phase typical of 'third wave' democratisation processes, where an early middle class democratic breakthrough is followed by struggles to extend and apply the benefits to subaltern groups" (1999:2). This conclusion is equally valid for Thailand. The legacy of political systems is therefore best considered in light of social and economic developments both nationally and globally that constitute most workers in the industrial and service sectors as subaltern and marginalised groups.

Labour regulation in theory and practice

What can labour regulation through legislation and state practices tell us about the potential for women workers to organise collectively? As discussed in Chapter One, an extensive body of research has analysed women's resistance to labour exploitation in relation to labour legislation and control by employers. To what extent does labour regulation and control in Thailand and Indonesia obstruct or encourage women's mobilisation and organisation? Are there significant differences between these countries?

Thailand

Thai labour regulation has seen many changes over time, often in conjunction with regime change and in line with the economic priorities of ruling elites. Current Thai labour legislation – as established by the 1975 Labour Relations Act – recognises four types of workers' organisations: labour union councils, labour union federations, (state) enterprise labour unions, and (private) industrial labour unions. According to the law, a labour union can be formed by a minimum of ten employees and a labour federation must consist of a minimum of two labour unions in the same industry. At least fifteen labour unions or federations can form a labour union council (Voravidh et al. n.d.:10).

Once again in force after being temporarily repealed during the 1991-1992 military regime, the 1975 Labour Relations Act has guaranteed workers in the private sector the right to organise, to bargain collectively with employers, and to strike. In reality, conservative or military-controlled administrations have not protected these rights, instead enabling employers to use loopholes in the law to fire those initiating a trade union (as workers are only protected from dismissal once their union has been formally registered). The Act has also introduced a system of tripartite, management-controlled labour relations (or labour management) committees that in many workplaces have replaced independent trade unions. Jaded Chaowilai from the NGO Friends of Women asserts that "these committees do not reflect workers' true interests. They have served instead as an effective tool by the state to control, restrict, and decrease the bargaining power of the trade unions" (n.d.:3).[2] Where

tripartite committees have been established at the behest of management and employers, trade unions have stood little chance of organising and gaining bargaining power.

The 1975 Labour Relations Act ostensibly set out to strengthen trade unions by guaranteeing freedom of association and facilitating the process of establishing unions. In effect, however, by allowing a minimum of ten people to form a union it led to a rapid increase in the number of small trade unions during the 1980s (see Chapter Four for statistics). The immediate results were not only the fragmentation of the labour movement but also fear among employers that the process of collective bargaining would become unmanageable due to the many competing groups of workers (Brown and Frenkel 1993). Through their internal policies, employers have also been able to obstruct the collection of dues by unions from their members; this in turn affects the financial stability of unions and their ability to carry out activities.[3]

If private sector workers at least had the right to organise and bargain collectively, the fortunes of public-sector workers changed drastically after the 1991 coup d'etat which temporarily brought to power a military junta. It introduced the 1991 State Enterprises Labour Relations Act which severely curtailed trade union rights. The Act barred state-owned enterprises from having trade unions, allowed striking workers to be replaced, and banned industry-wide bargaining (Bundit 2004). This has had far-reaching negative effects on union activism in Thailand where public-sector unions, the vanguard of the labour movement, had set the pace for private-sector wage increases.

International organisations have long demanded the withdrawal of this legislation, and the 2000 State Enterprises Labour Relations Act went some way to improve this situation by restoring the right to organise and register. Nevertheless, this new Act continues to prohibit the right to strike for state enterprise employees (Voravidh et al.: n.d.; Brown 2004; Bundit 2004; Jaded n.d.). The ILO has repeatedly criticised Thailand for the lack of legal protection for workers in the public sector. Thailand has also been under pressure to ratify the core International Labour Standards Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (1948), Convention No. 98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining (1949) and Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration (1951). According to the ILO's specialist on labour standards in Bangkok, the lack of ratification of

Conventions 87 and 98 is "partly due to a tendency to regard labour unions as economically disruptive rather than a force for social improvement" (paraphrased in *Bangkok Post* 4 June 2004).

In theory, women workers are protected against discrimination and unequal treatment under Thai labour legislation and the 1997 Constitution. As a result of a 1993 ruling by the Ministry of Interior (before the establishment of the Ministry of Labour), women employees are entitled to ninety days maternity, half of which is at normal pay rate (paid by the employer).[4] However, in recent years, the outsourcing and subcontracting of work has resulted in the creation of large new groups of vulnerable workers who are not able to organise collectively under current labour laws. Workers on short-term contracts and subcontractors are prohibited by their employers from joining trade unions even if they work alongside permanent unionised employees. The short-term nature of their contracts means that they have little job security and therefore are unlikely to organise in unions. Though no exact figures are known, many if not most of these workers are likely to be women. Oxfam and Thai Labour Campaign (a Bangkok-based NGO) estimate that 90 per cent of subcontracted workers in the Thai garment industry are women (Oxfam 2004b). As is often reported, this is because of women in manufacturing industries frequently being dismissed due to cost-cutting measures, only to be rehired shortly afterwards as piece-rate workers or on lower-paid and temporary contracts that give them few, if any, rights in the workplace. Older women also generally have lower skill and education levels and often have family responsibilities which compel them to take on home-based work or insecure contracts.

Labour activists have repeatedly called on the government to extend to workers in contracting or outsourcing arrangements the right to join trade unions and the right to strike and bargain collectively (Bundit 2004). However, many trade unions appear ambivalent about the (unlikely) prospect of these workers joining them. They fear the competition from cheaper workers will weaken union structures and their membership in unions would imply acceptance by unions of the practice of labour flexibilisation. It is not surprising, therefore, that several trade union federations have tried to limit the percentage of work done by contract or outsourced labour (Bundit 2004). Opportunities for organising have also been limited for workers in free-trade zones or export-processing zones, where the Thai

government has implicitly banned unionising in the name of attracting foreign investment (AMRC 1998; Theobald 2002:134).

Workers in the informal economy have found organising especially difficult, due to the dispersed and sometimes illegal nature of workplaces and workers' low bargaining power vis-à-vis employers and government. Especially in the case of home-based work, unionisation is almost impossible because of the absence of a clear employer-employee relationship, extreme family dependence on this source of income, and a shortage of alternative income-generating possibilities. With the exception of the new Ministerial Order on Homeworkers (of June 2004), workers in the informal economy are completely without protection under the labour law. They have little access to social security or welfare benefits designed for permanent employees in the modern sector, although the gradual introduction of social security for laid-off workers in 2004 may go some way to overcoming this problem.

Intimidation is frequently a part of the work culture. Women workers are cheated and intimidated by employers and security forces more frequently than men because of their perceived passivity and lack of knowledge about labour laws (though intimidation happens even to those who possess detailed knowledge of the labour law) (CAW 1995; Asian Exchange 1995; Brown and Frenkel 1993; Oxfam 2004a). Clearly, a political system that fails to punish violations of labour laws gives only few of the legal assurances needed for effective unionisation. Brown also asserts that "although the scale of [state] repression has eased over the last two decades, the continuing importance of the phenomenon in understanding contemporary labour relations should not be underestimated ... Even those who have been prepared to stay within the rules of the game must continually struggle to exercise their rights" (1997:172-3). Thus, both physical and psychological threats pose powerful constraints to mobilising and organising among Thai women workers.

This is substantiated through my interviews with union women in Thailand who had experienced a wide range of threats and coercion by their employers or hired security personnel. When asked to describe constraints to unionisation, one union secretary in Bangkok recounted how her union faced difficulties in attracting candidates for its upcoming elections because the human resources department of her factory had pointedly

asked each worker if they were candidates and if they were going to vote: "It is difficult to get long-term commitment as a group... Some are afraid to lose their jobs."[5] Employers are also known to bribe potential union activists or promote them to jobs where their activism is much harder to sustain than on the shop floor.[6] Given that almost half of all dismissals in 2002 in the industrial sector concerned women[7] (whereas women constitute around one-third of this labour force and the industrial sector as a whole experienced positive growth rates in 2002) and workers have little chance of successfully challenging employers in court, women workers often have no choice but to give in to such threats from employers and managers.

In conclusion, legal restrictions on trade unionism, insufficient legal protection for union organisers, intimidation by employers, and the use of flexible employment arrangements are important obstacles to the effective operation of trade unions in Thailand. The Thai state has shown little willingness to protect union activists from repression by employers. These problems are compounded by the growing trend towards subcontracting and outsourcing which, by creating insecure jobs, further decrease the likelihood of workers organising. Workers in the informal economy have even fewer possibilities for organising collectively, as their bargaining power vis-à-vis employers is extremely low. All these factors apply to men as well as women, though women are likely to feel their impact more strongly due to their predominance in vulnerable kinds of employment.

Indonesia

Having served as an instrument of suppression of the labour movement for more than thirty years, Indonesia's industrial relations system is by turns called exclusionary (Hadiz 1997) or repressive (Saptari 1995:58). The former term refers to the absence of workers from structures and institutions established by the Suharto regime to deal with labour issues (in contrast to corporatist or populist models of labour control), while the latter takes its cue from the attempts by the government and security apparatus to silence workers claiming a voice in decision-making. Whereas Thailand at times saw civilian administrations accord limited political freedoms to labour, the Suharto regime set out during the late 1960s and early 1970s to exercise full control over all labour groups by unifying existing trade unions into one peak body. Previously named the All Indonesian Workers' Federation, the

Federation of All Indonesian Labour Unions (F-SPSI) was nominally independent but clearly controlled by the regime through the appointment of a Suharto ally as its head, the election of retired military personnel as local union leaders, and the infiltration of security officers into its ranks (Hadiz 1997).

Under the influence of the national Pancasila ideology propagated by the New Order government, the cornerstone of the Indonesian industrial relations system came to be solving industrial disputes through consensus and agreement (Musyawarah Mufakat).[8] However, in reality, "the (internationally-promoted) ideology of Development, with its emphasis on economic growth, a powerful elite and the oppression of the *rakyat jelata*, or ordinary people – and not *Pancasila*, with its emphasis on social justice – was the overarching ideological imperative of the New Order state" (Ford 2000:3). National economic development required harmonious relations between employers and workers in which the latter were encouraged to see their interests as closely entwined with those of their employers (Ford 1999, 2000; Manning 1998; Lambert 1997).

An integral part of these efforts to silence the voice of workers was the shift in semantics, similar to changes in Thailand in the 1960s. In order to erase references to communist ideology, in the Pancasila Industrial Relations system workers were called *pekerja* or *karyawan* (employee) rather than *buruh* (labour); *pemecatan* (dismissal) became *pemutusan hubungan kerja* (termination of work relations); and *mogok* (strike) was replaced by *unjuk rasa* (expressing feelings). "Since the emphasis in the industrial relations system was on family spirit and mutual cooperation, anything connoting a one-sided action or non-cooperative tone should be erased from the vocabulary. Workers were portrayed as 'black ants' (*semut hitam*) symbolising the hard work they were meant to do" (Saptari 1995:53). It was particularly after the mid-1980s that these changes to vocabulary began to be felt.

Despite the ability of the F-SPSI to suppress independent unionisation, genuine alternatives sprung up from time to time. Firstly, because registration requirements and threats from employers made it impossible for workers to establish rival unions to the F-SPSI in their workplaces, NGOs filled the void by organising support groups and workers' education activities outside the workplace (Ford 2000, 2001). Few of these awareness-raising efforts made a deep impact on the oppressive conditions under which most workers operated.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that NGO activities contributed to the expansion of workers' repertoires of contention in the early 1990s, when the number of industrial disputes suddenly rose dramatically in the greater Jakarta area in protest against working conditions and increasingly glaring disparities in income and social welfare (Kammen 1997; Quinn 2003:7-8). Secondly, Hadiz (1997, 2001) also reports the emergence of community-based organising vehicles, initiated by both labour NGOs and workers themselves and operating under the pretext of welfare, educational, cultural, or religious activities (discussed in Chapter Four). These groups were quickly suppressed by security personnel and their leaders imprisoned.

After the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, Indonesia under Habibie became the first country to ratify all core conventions of the ILO, regarding freedom of organisation and the right to collective bargaining; forced labour; non-discrimination and equality; minimum age; and the abolition of the worst forms of child labour.[9] Since then, the Indonesian government has also passed three new laws on labour issues: the 2000 Trade Union/Labour Union Act; the 2003 Manpower Act; and the 2004 Industrial Relations Dispute Settlement Act.[10]

The Trade Union Act significantly widened the conditions under which workers were allowed to organise and practise collective bargaining. Specifically, it gave them the right to form and become members of trade unions, federations of trade unions and confederations of trade unions which the Act stipulates must be "free, open, independent, democratic and responsible." In an important break with the previous centralised and state-controlled industrial relations system, managers were not allowed to become trade union members. Similar to Thai legislation, the Act ostensibly set out to strengthen trade unions by guaranteeing freedom of association and facilitating the process of establishing unions. By allowing only ten workers to set up a trade union and more than one union to participate in collective bargaining (if no union represents more than 50 per cent of the workers), the Act has contributed to the rapid increase in the number of trade unions. This has resulted in fragmentation, internal rivalries in the labour movement, and competition for scarce foreign funding (Quinn 2003:17).

While both the Trade Union and the Dispute Settlement Acts elicited critique from workers and employers alike, the 2003 Manpower Act was and continues to be the main subject of controversy among the Indonesian labour movement and its international supporters. The Act was passed only after lengthy negotiations between government, workers and employers, and some large-scale union protests. Although it includes provisions of importance to women workers (e.g. menstruation and maternity leave, family benefits and insurance, working hours), women's participation in the negotiations was minimal (the small team of six union leaders selected to negotiate with the Ministry of Manpower and employers contained only one woman). As a result of this silencing and pressure by employers, the new Act has minimised women's right to menstruation leave, although provisions on maternity leave, equal pay for equal work, underground work, and night work were left untouched. Several major union federations continue to reject the Act.

In discussions among labour groups and employers about the new Manpower Act, subcontracting clearly emerged as the most contentious item. Previously unregulated, subcontracting has now come under the purview of the Act, which stipulates that employers may subcontract non-core work but that such work must be done under conditions that are of the same standard (i.e. concerning wages, hours, safety etc) as that enjoyed by regular employees. Seen from this perspective, the Act is a positive development insofar as it regulates an increasingly common practice. Objections from trade unions focus on the practical obstacle that workers will not organise in unions and demand their rights if they fear that their contract will not be renewed because of such actions. Furthermore, the Act does not clearly specify the grounds on which core activities are distinguished from non-core activities, thus necessitating further ministerial decisions and other government regulations to clarify the law. Because of the prevalence of corruption, trade union activists fear that the Act will permit employers to test the boundaries of the already overworked and inefficient justice system. Although subcontracting affects both men and women, women workers are often more vulnerable due to their frequent classification as low-skilled or unskilled labour (which can easily be outsourced), the difficulties they experience in entering an already crowded labour market, and their predominance in industrial sectors that are prone to cost-cutting measures.

In recent years, discussion of alternative forms of regulation, such as social clauses, codes of conduct and framework agreements, has become widespread, although implementation in Indonesia is so far limited to a small number of multinational companies (Wick 2003; Kuehl 2003). However, the overwhelming majority of workers continue to rely on national labour legislation and enforcement agencies located in the Indonesian government. The above discussion shows that compliance with and enforcement of labour laws leave much to be desired while many workers have expressed their dissatisfaction with the new Manpower Act, specifically with its provisions on menstruation leave and subcontracting.

Comparison

Many significant similarities in labour legislation and its impact on workers' abilities to mobilise and organise collectively exist between the two countries. In both, legislation permitting the establishment of trade unions by a minimal number of workers resulted in the mushrooming of trade unions. This has at times encouraged employers to establish unions through their supporters or to manipulate union elections or leadership contests. Such legislation has contributed to the fragmentation of the national labour movement and undermined the legitimacy of trade unions in the eyes of the larger public. In both countries, workers also face the consequences of extensive subcontracting and outsourcing of work once done by members of trade unions. As legislation forbids unionisation of such workers or does not offer them sufficient protection from reprisals by employers, trade union activism and membership have declined in several sectors and is likely to continue to do so in both countries. These similarities indicate that Thailand and Indonesia are both subject to pressures brought about by globalisation and economic restructuring and that both states have responded similarly to such pressures by passing legislation that restricts or obstructs trade unionism.

However, the industrial relations systems in the two countries have in the past had distinct and different impacts on workers' ability to organise collectively. Whereas the labour force in Indonesia until the late 1990s operated under an exclusionary system of industrial relations that did not give workers a free and democratic voice in policy-making, civilian regimes in Thailand at times applied a system combining co-optation and repression in an interactive relationship with labour (though at other times military regimes employed

primarily repressive strategies) (Brown 2004:13). Though the effect of exclusion of workers from formal political processes of decision-making was probably the same in both countries, this difference is significant in that the direct labour repression by the New Order regime in Indonesia radicalised parts of the labour movement that were able to sustain their activities in the face of state-sanctioned violence.

Meanwhile, the Thai system at times posed more subtle, though no less serious, obstacles for the labour movement in that country, thereby perhaps leading workers to believe that they could challenge and change the industrial relations system in a gradual fashion. The Thai labour movement during the 1980s and 1990s could probably count larger numbers of active members and committed local supporters relative to the size of the workforce than in Indonesia, due to its relatively free and open nature (at least in the private sector). Therefore, the particular institutional arrangement in Thailand is likely to have helped women workers gain some measure of influence and experience in trade unions through their participation in a variety of protest actions (though not always in positions equal to men, as Chapters Five and Six will show).

The New Order government in Indonesia certainly attempted to institutionalise and neutralise workers' contention against employers and the state. It did so by restricting all labour protests to ritualised expressions of discontent by the F-SPSI, by limiting workers' expressions of grievance to inconsequential bargaining agreements that remained unimplemented, and by employing intimidation and violence against those who challenged the industrial relations system. However, through these actions the Indonesian state arguably sided with business interests so blatantly that few workers trusted the state-sanctioned trade union federation as an institution that would defend their rights at work.

Although the Thai state also colluded with business interests and, especially under military regimes, employed violence to subdue labour protest, its attempts to institutionalise workers' protest actions were perhaps more *indirectly* intended to neutralise trade unions. For example, workers in the private sector were allowed to participate in workers' councils that directly competed with trade unions. Furthermore, throughout the 1990s the Department (later Ministry) of Labour established numerous committees to examine workers' grievances in order to call a halt to often disruptive and sometimes violent forms

of workers' protest. Although workers in both countries were in effect largely excluded from policy-making and politics, it is likely that such indirect measures as described above allowed Thai (women) workers greater participation in trade union affairs than if there was direct repression of workers' activism. The different impacts of the industrial relations systems on women workers in the two countries also are a function of women's position in the labour market, which will be analysed in the next section.

Women's labour market position

The nature of local and national labour markets may also exert significant influence on workers' decisions to pursue union activism. The sectors and jobs in which women find themselves impact greatly on their ability to exercise their rights at work. This section will analyse the labour market position of women in the countries under discussion, arguing that labour surplusses have negatively influenced their potential for collective organising. Labour market position will be considered in terms of both quality and quantity of jobs, that is both the availability of jobs and the particular sectors and kinds of jobs in which women are often concentrated. Although this section focuses particularly on women workers, it will be emphasised that in some cases male workers share characteristics with their female counterparts, such as vulnerability to economic restructuring, low wages, and lack of protection under national labour laws.

Thailand

As mentioned previously, Thai workers have experienced several long periods during which the state banned collective organising and bargaining. These measures benefited the political objectives of the groups and interests that controlled the Thai state at various times by guaranteeing a stable economic climate which would encourage high returns to foreign and domestic investment. Thailand's industrial development first took off in the late 1950s with state policies geared to promote import-substitution in which both foreign and domestic investment played important roles. While the focus of industrialisation shifted to export-orientation in the 1980s, foreign investors and the increasingly powerful domestic capitalist class remain the main actors in the state's efforts to stimulate economic growth and job creation. As Table 3.1 below shows, agriculture has declined in importance to the

Thai economy, while manufacturing has grown consistently over the past twenty-five years. By mid-2003, manufacturing accounted for 39 per cent of Thailand's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (World Bank n.d.). To this end, both export-processing zones and general industrial zones or estates have been established where investors receive favourable treatment in the form of lower taxes and cheap utilities in the midst of relatively abundant supplies of unskilled or low-skilled labour (Jaded n.d.). The resulting rapid economic development contributed to the expansion of women's participation as formal employees in labour-intensive industries in the modern sector (Mathana 1996) and their predominance in vulnerable informal positions due to their temporary migration and the demand for docile and cheap labour by the export-oriented sector (Kurian 1999).

According to the 2003 Labour Force Survey, Thailand counts a labour force of 35.09 million people (or 54.7 per cent of the total population of 64.11 million), of whom 34.33 million are working, 630,000 are unemployed, and 130,000 are seasonal workers (semi-unemployed) (NSO 2003a). The unemployment rate in the greater Bangkok area is estimated at 2.5 per cent, whereas the nation-wide average is 1.8 per cent (accounting for seasonal differences; compared with 3.3 per cent in 2001) (see Table 3.2 below). Of the officially unemployed, slightly less than half (300,000) are women; yet, this proportion can partially be explained by women's tendency to take up any job available to fulfill their family's basic needs.

Though the highest proportion of workers is still employed in agriculture, the Thai economy has seen a gradual shift of jobs throughout the 1980s and early 1990s from agriculture to industry and service (see Table 3.3 below). The weak position of women in the labour market can be seen clearly from their employment status. While the percentage of women and men in waged or salaried employment is nearly equal, 39.8 per cent of women but only 16.4 per cent of men were contributing family workers. Meanwhile, the percentage of self-employed women is less than half that of men workers (see Table 3.3 below). The predominance of women working as contributing family workers means that many women workers lack formal protection under labour legislation and have limited independent opportunities for wage-earning and upward mobility as workers.

Table 3.1: Sectoral growth in Thailand

	Annual average growth (%)			*% of GDP*		
	1982-92	1992-02	2001	1982	1992	2001
Agriculture	4.0	1.1	-10.1	18.5	12.3	8.5
Industry	11.8	3.5	4.5	29.5	38.1	42.0
- manufacturing	11.8	4.8	5.0	21.3	27.5	33.3
Services	8.4	2.0	2.5	51.9	49.6	49.5

Source: World Bank (n.d.).

Table 3.2: Key labour market indicators in Thailand disaggregated by sex

	1990	*1995*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Population (millions)	55.84	59.40	62.41		63.31
Unemployment rate (%)					
Quarter 1 (total)	3.5	2.0	4.2	2.8	2.9
Quarter 3 (total)	2.2	1.1	2.4	2.1	1.8
Quarter 1 Male	3.0	1.8	4.1	2.9	
Quarter 3 Male	2.0	0.9	2.4	2.3	
Quarter 1 Female	4.1	2.3	4.4	2.7	
Quarter 3 Female	2.1	1.3	2.3	1.9	
Labour Force Participation (Q3) (%)					
Male	87.7	83.5	80.6	81.8	81.5
Female	76.3	68.9	64.9	66.6	65.6

Sources: World Bank (n.d.), National Statistical Office (2003b) and United Nations Development Program (2004).

Since embarking on export-oriented, labour-intensive industrialisation, Thailand has witnessed the phenomenon of large-scale domestic and cross-border labour migration to urban centres. Industrial estates and free-trade zones first started emerging around Bangkok and nearby ports, and gradually extended to semi-urban areas, providing job opportunities close to the homes of surplus rural labour (Mills 1998; Yoddumnern-Attig et al. 1992; Theobald 2002). These new employment opportunities have drawn thousands of young women in particular to the factories, sharply increasing women's participation in the formal labour force. Women have also rapidly become absorbed in the urban labour force through domestic service and home-based work. These changes in employment status from unpaid family worker to waged or subcontracted worker stem largely from rural poverty which forces young women (as well as men) to seek urban jobs to support their families in the

villages.[11] The decline in the fertility rate (number of births per woman) from 3.5 in 1980 to 1.8 in 2000 (World Bank n.d.) has significantly contributed to, and at the same time reflects, the growth of women's labour force participation. Taken together, these demographic changes have had far-reaching consequences for women's labour force participation.

Table 3.3: Sectoral composition of the Thai labour market disaggregated by sex

	1990	*1995*	*2000*
Share of waged and employed workers			
Male (% of male labour force)	31	38	40
Female (% of female labour force)	26	32	39
Share of self-employed			
Male	42	43	43
Female	18	21	21
Share of contributing family workers			
Male	26.9	18.5	16.4
Female	56.1	46.5	39.8
Sector of employment			
Agriculture			
Male (% of male labour force)	63	51	50
Female (% of female labour force)	65	53	48
Industry			
Male	16	22	20
Female	12	17	17
Services			
Male	21	27	30
Female	23	29	35

Sources: World Bank (n.d.), National Statistical Office (2003b) and United Nations Development Program (2004).

To the extent that increased labour force participation allowed Thai women greater contact with other working women and more exposure to formal structures of labour control (e.g. in a factory setting), these changes are likely to have increased the potential for women workers' collective organising. On the other hand, the insecure nature of many women's jobs and the pressures on young women to contribute to the household income have provided disincentives for collective organising. Moreover, the high concentration of employees in small (though very often formal) industrial workplaces with fewer than ten workers obstructs access to information about labour rights and constitutes a serious obstacle to organising in the manufacturing sector in Thailand (Brown and Frenkel 1993).

The impact of these factors depends on how easily women workers can find new jobs. If jobs are scarce, it is likely that few women would be willing to risk dismissal by joining workers' organisations, whereas a growing labour demand may lower the risk of workers' agitation. In the early 1990s, the almost continual expansion of industrial employment in the greater Bangkok area perhaps allowed women workers greater flexibility in organising collectively, whereas strikes and other protest action decreased when the job market contracted due to the financial crisis of the late 1990s.

Statistical evidence suggests that women workers were over-represented among those laid-off during the early part of the financial crisis that hit Thailand in 1997 (ILO 1998). By contributing to dismissals and job insecurity and prompting both Thai and foreign enterprises to implement flexible labour policies, the financial crisis in Thailand also led to a sharp decrease in the number of strike actions. In 1997, there were 15 strikes involving 8,850 workers with a duration of 248 days, dropping to 3 involving 909 workers with a duration of 25 days in 1999 (Voravidh et al. n.d.:13). The numbers of labour disputes and workers involved in them fluctuated during the peak years of dismissals but returned to pre-crisis levels in 2001. More than 70 per cent of all cases before the labour court during 2001 were brought by workers against employers regarding unfair dismissal and outstanding benefits (Brown, Bundit and Hewison 2002:13). Thus, while job insecurity constitutes a disincentive to collective organising, at the same time it may also remind workers of the necessity of trade unionism to defend their rights in the workplace.

More generally, new global economic pressures affect women's ability to mobilise and organise. As mentioned earlier, global processes of economic restructuring have created radically different methods and relations of production, many of which cause unionisation rates to decrease or stagnate. While initially this transformation led to an increase in women's access to light manufacturing jobs in developing countries including Thailand, more recently a large proportion of these women have been compelled to take on casualised and flexible work, in both the formal and informal sectors (Oxfam 2004a). Contract or casual work status, long probation periods, and other forms of insecure employment are additional and powerful deterrents to protest of any kind, since in the current economic climate of declining investment in labour-intensive industries, such as textiles and footwear, workers cannot immediately find new jobs and at the same time cannot afford to

be unemployed for long.[13] In conclusion, in Thailand the impact of the labour market on women's ability to mobilise and organise collectively is likely to be mostly negative. Although women have entered the formal labour market in considerable numbers during the past two decades, their jobs are largely insecure and are in sectors where workers are vulnerable to subcontracting and outsourcing as well as large-scale dismissals during an economic down-turn or crisis.

Indonesia

Recent Indonesian history has seen major shifts in labour market dynamics, and especially in women's participation and locations in the labour market. With the growing shift between 1970 and 1985 from traditional labour-intensive (mostly food and tobacco) and import-substituting (chemical, rubber, transport equipment) industries to new export-oriented industries, large numbers of young urban women entered formal wage labour for the first time. The Indonesian government's deregulation policies of the 1980s and its active support for foreign investment stimulated the growth of labour-intensive manufacturing industries such as garment and textiles, footwear, furniture, plastics, electronics, and food and beverages production (Ford 2003; Saptari 1995; Manning 1998). Formal sector employment increased from 28 to 35.2 per cent of total employment between 1990 and 1996 (Sulistyaningsih 2003). These industries provided jobs for thousands of young women and men, initially in industrial areas near Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Semarang and Medan, but in more recent years also in smaller urban areas.[14]

While in terms of output and value-added the manufacturing sector is dominated by a small number of large firms, employment remains largely concentrated in small firms and cottage industries (Smyth and Grijns 1997:16). This and the resulting isolation of workplaces constitute a serious obstacle to efforts to organise manufacturing workers. The following table gives an overview of labour market indicators.

Table 3.4: Key labour market indicators for Indonesia

	1990	*1995*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2002*
Unemployment rate (%)	2.6	4.7	5.4	6.3	6.1	
Urban			9.3	10.5	6.1	
Rural			3.2	3.7	4.1	
Underemployment rate (%)	30.5	31.6	35.1	33.4	31.5	
Urban			8.3	8.4	7.4	
Rural			26.4	30.2	24.0	
Labour force participation rate (%)	53.1	65.4	66.9	67.2	67.8	
Male	82.8	84.5	83.2	83.6	84.2	85.6
Female	44.2	46.9	51.2	51.2	51.7	50.1
Share of employment (%)						
Male	64.8	64.6	61.5	61.8	61.7	
Female	35.2	35.4	38.5	38.2	38.3	
Urban	24.5	31.8	34.5	36.4	37.9	
Rural	75.5	61.2	65.5	63.6	62.0	

Source: Van Zorge 2002, based on data from Ministry of Manpower and Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS).

Results of the 2002 National Labour Force Survey showed that 67.8 per cent (or 100.9 million people) of the population were part of the work force (based on reporting of the previous week's activities), of which 61.6 per cent worked (paid workers, employers and unpaid family workers) and 6.2 per cent actively sought work. Women's labour force participation rate was significantly lower than men's for all age groups (50.1 versus 85.6 per cent) as 37.8 per cent of all female respondents reported being housewives. Rural areas experienced higher female labour force participation than urban areas. Young women's responsibility for child care and household tasks was reflected in the finding that women's participation is highest among the 45-49 age group (60.6 per cent) whose children have already grown up and moved out or could help to take of the household. While the formal economy counts 27.3 million workers according to government estimates, the informal economy absorbs the remainder of those who are employed, estimated at 52 million workers (Van Zorge 2002).

As a result of the 1998 Indonesian economic crisis, the deteriorating security situation in parts of the country, rampant corruption and continuing inefficiencies, investor confidence in Indonesia has decreased. This has contributed to the withdrawal of foreign direct investment that would have provided thousands of jobs (most prominently in the mining

and gas sector and in labour-intensive manufacturing). Macro-economic trends such as exchange rate fluctuations, ineffective government policies, and regional competition have resulted in low export growth rates (between 4 and 5 per cent in early 2004). Although the financial sector has stabilised remarkably since the days of the economic crisis, the recovery has been largely 'jobless' because of the nature of capital flows into the country (Ramli 2004; Van Zorge 2002).[15]

As a clear indication of the resulting problems, between 1997 and 2003 measured unemployment rates increased from 4.7 to 9.3 per cent, while underemployment (those above 15 years old working 35 hours per week or less) rose to 39.3 per cent (or 41.5 million people) (Ramli 2004:28). This amounted to 9.1 million openly unemployed and an additional 28.9 million underemployed in 2002 (BPS 2003). Among the female population, open unemployment (including discouraged job-seekers and those waiting for work) stood at 11.8 per cent in 2002, compared to 7.5 per cent of men. The highest figures were recorded for the 15-19 age group where 40 per cent of women and 30.7 per cent of men were unemployed. In total, open unemployment among the 15-24 age group amounted for more than half the total unemployed (BPS 2003). Dismissals in the manufacturing sector have frequently been reported in the local press and are widely expected to continue during the remainder of 2004. Especially the garment, textile and leather sector is set to feel the impact of the abolition of the Multi-Fibre Agreement and its preferential export quota system in January 2005. Similar to the situation in Thailand, these economic difficulties could lead either to greater mobilisation and organisation to defend existing workers' rights or to a decrease in activism in order to safeguard jobs.

Aside from higher unemployment rates, significant gender differences are also evident in employment status and wages. Whereas almost half of both women and men in urban areas are paid employees or labourers, 17.9 per cent of urban women are unpaid workers (compared to only 3.2 per cent of urban men).[16] In rural areas, these differences are even more pronounced with 47.5 per cent of women being unpaid workers compared to 9.8 per cent of men. Unpaid work impinges on people's ability to protect their rights in the workplace, as they are mostly found in irregular and informal jobs in small workplaces where they have little bargaining power with their employer.[17]

Labour force survey statistics show that women's earnings are consistently lower than men's when disaggregated by educational attainment (BPS 2003; Manning 1998:258).[18] Except for the transport sector, women's average wages are lower than men's in all main occupations and industries, with women earning as little as 52 per cent of men's wages in agriculture and forestry. The highest percentage of permanent workers earning less than the minimum wage in 1995 was found in small and medium-sized enterprises and in the footwear sector (Pangestu and Hendytio 1997), indicating a high risk of poverty.[19] A second indicator, working hours, shows that 47.3 per cent of women worked 35 hours per week or less, compared to 26.9 per cent of men (BPS 2003). Although reduced working hours are sometimes a sign of women's preference to be able to combine their work with family responsibilities, the wages they receive are most likely insufficient to provide for their household, thereby increasing their reliance on other wage-earners or forcing them to take on a second job. While this situation may encourage women workers to mobilise and organise in trade unions to demand better wages, poverty and the fear of job loss may equally prevent women from initiating or participating in collective action.

In terms of legislation, Indonesian workers fare well in theory, as a result of government intervention regulating dismissals and separation payment, setting minimum wage levels, and recognising collective labour agreements (Manning 1998). Women workers in particular are well protected by law, as the Manpower Act (13/2003) grants several special rights related to women's reproductive functions. The current provision allows for women in all workplaces to take leave during the first and second day of their menstruation, on the condition that they can show a relevant medical certificate.

Although menstruation leave is a controversial issue because it increases the cost of employing women, many union women see it as necessary because of low nutritional standards among women workers and unhygienic conditions in most workplaces. In practice, however, this provision and others have little impact in the majority of workplaces, aside from providing a disincentive for some employers to recruit women. Not only do many women fear dismissal or demotion if they take menstruation leave, but many also refuse examination by a doctor appointed by management, who is usually a man (Suryomenggolo 2002). Furthermore, many women lose their incentive payments or attendance bonus if they take menstruation leave, which in the context of very low monthly

wages is tantamount to limiting women's free choice. Where women predominate in small enterprises (as older women do in Indonesia), they may be especially vulnerable to paternalistic labour relations that prohibit organising collectively and make implementation of labour legislation unlikely (Smyth and Grijns 1997:17).

Similar practical obstacles also limit the implementation of provisions on maternity protection. Women workers have the right to paid maternity leave 1.5 months before and 1.5 months after giving birth or suffering a miscarriage. Afterwards their employer must re-employ them in the same position and in the same place. Pregnant and breastfeeding women may not be forced to undertake work that endangers their health or that of their child. However, in the absence of government funding for maternity benefits, employers prefer to reduce costs by hiring single workers or dismissing pregnant workers (World Bank et al. 1999; Singarimbun and Sairin 1995). Legislation passed in 1989 has made termination of employment on the basis of marriage, pregnancy, or giving birth illegal (PER-03/MEN/1989). Nevertheless, violations of this law occur from time to time, according to surveys, informal reports and personal interviews.

A 1995 World Bank survey of 300 workers in the textile, garment, and footwear sectors (with 85 per cent of the sample employed in large firms) found that 96 per cent of firms complied with maternity leave provisions, 91 per cent with working hours provisions, and 89 per cent with maternity leave compensation (Pangestu and Hendytio 1997). However, the survey found low compliance with provisions calling for breastfeeding facilities, overtime compensation, and menstruation leave. However, legal experts working with labour-related and women's NGOs routinely receive complaints and calls for help from women workers concerning illegal dismissal related to pregnancy or motherhood, unpaid wages, dubious factory closures (with the factory opening up a short while later under a different name and with new workers), and forced overtime without appropriate benefits (see also World Bank et al. 1999).

While these complaints cannot be taken as an indication of the size of the overall problem, it is highly likely that such violations are especially common in smaller enterprises where enforcement of labour legislation is often low due to the absence of international pressure, the lack of internal enterprise standards, and the pressures of subcontracting. This suspicion

was confirmed by a 1997 World Bank survey of managers and supervisors that showed a worker's sex to be the third most frequently cited factor in recruitment decisions among a range of occupational sectors (see Table 3.5 below).

Table 3.5: Factors affecting recruitment in different occupations in Indonesia

	Managers	*Technicians*	*Bookkeepers*	*Secretarial*	*Supervisor*	*Skilled*	*Unskilled*
Age	90	83	83	100	100	91	82
Education	90	83	87	89	94	64	4
Sex	80	91	60	79	78	93	93
Marital status	70	35	50	56	56	38	51
Training	50	48	43	17	17	5	3

Note: Percentage of firms agreeing that a factor is important.
Source: World Bank (1997:92).

Further protective legislation is still on the books in Indonesia, in the form of a Ministerial Decision (Per-04/MEN/1989) which prohibits women employees from working at night, and the provision in the 2000 Manpower Act which prohibits women from working in mines. Although both of these provisions state some exceptions (notably for work that must be done by women and for workplaces that receive special permission for night work by their women employees), they effectively restrict women's access to employment opportunities which are at times lucrative and always much needed. Jafar Suryomenggolo (2002) from the Trade Union Rights Centre notes that legal safeguards in the Ministerial Decision on night work often do not work in practice.[20] Thus, women workers enjoy little protection from the dangers of night work but are at the same time unable to take advantage of it even when it is well paid. The same situation is found with regard to underground work.

How women workers have experienced the Indonesian industrial relations system and in particular how they have made use of existing structures and initiated new organisations will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven. However, at this point it can be concluded that the legal system has offered women workers little protection from exploitation and discrimination in the workplace. The above analysis indicates that workers have ample reason to doubt the adequacy of existing legal protection, both in general and in particular with regard to collective action. Among the recurrent features of women workers' lives are

low wages, long hours, and segregation into low-skilled manufacturing jobs (often contract-based), while high unemployment rates have created a large reserve labour force eager to take up formal employment. These conditions are far from conducive to unionisation or even ad-hoc collective action in the workplace. In conclusion, since the economic crisis, downsizing, restructuring, and women's predominance in vulnerable employment keep them from joining trade unions and decrease the effectiveness of the unions.

Comparison

In both countries, the rising labour force participation of women in the formal (modern) economy since the late 1970s has been a significant development at the national level, though Indonesia experienced a slightly later start than Thailand. In both cases, this was a result of the switch away from import-substitution to export-oriented industrialisation that involved large-scale domestic and foreign investment in labour-intensive industries. Where women workers are concerned, Thailand and Indonesia have experienced similar paths of economic development that have largely incorporated women into the labour force as secondary, cheap workers. Sizable groups of women work in labour-intensive manufacturing and home-based enterprises in both countries. Those in formal employment such as manufacturing are subject to varying degrees of labour control at their workplace through the prevailing industrial relations system, which in both countries allows subcontracting and frequently does not take serious action against employers who violate labour legislation by paying below the minimum wage, enforcing excessive overtime, or closing workplaces without proper compensation. Meanwhile, those in domestic work or home-based work have been excluded from the industrial relations system and cannot claim any labour protection.

While labour legislation in Indonesia contains more protective provisions than in Thailand, particularly with regard to maternity and menstruation leave, this difference is not likely to have a great impact on women workers' ability to mobilise and organise collectively. The reality for many women workers in manufacturing, service, and home-based industries is that they are often employed because they are cheaper than men and easy to replace due to their relatively low (classification of) skill levels. In both countries, these factors may prevent them from mobilising and organising collectively, although they may equally

motivate women to do so, provided that feelings of dissatisfaction, political awareness, and common identification are sufficiently strong.

Many observers of women's work have noted the negative impact of structures of labour control on workers' willingness to organise collectively in both countries. Production quotas for groups of workers that are tied to bonuses encourage workers to exploit themselves in search of a decent income, while increases in the speed of automated production on the shop floor constitute a disincentive for talking with fellow workers (Saptari 1995; Wolf 1992; Lee 1998; Tjandraningsih 1995; Mather 1988; Oxfam 2004a, 2004b). Long working hours and restrictions on talking on the shop floor further minimise the possibility of solidarity arising among women workers (Tjandraningsih 1995:51; Oxfam 2004a). In addition, new systems of labour control have emerged as part of the shift towards subcontracting, outsourcing and home-based work. In sum, the slow recovery from economic crisis – as evidenced in lagging employment growth rates – together with the vulnerable position of women in the global gender division of labour and the gap between the theory and reality of labour protection make it unlikely that many women will mount collective challenges vis-à-vis their employers.

Although this discussion has focused on women at the lower end of the labour market, it is important to keep in mind the differences between Thailand and Indonesia in terms of the proportion of more highly skilled women in the workforce. While women make up 52.4 per cent of all professional and technical workers in Thailand, they account for 40.8 per cent in Indonesia. The contrast is greater for the category administrators and managers, where Thai women account for 21.8 per cent but Indonesian women for 6.6 per cent (UNDP 1998). Higher educational achievement and a tradition of women in business and trading in Thailand may account for this. While these factors may not necessarily have a direct impact on women's ability to organise collectively at the lower end of the labour market, they indicate the large gaps between various groups of women in the workforce in Thailand. Whether these different groups have the potential to learn from each other's experiences will be analysed in greater detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that in both Indonesia and Thailand restrictive labour legislation and other strategies by governments and employers have effectively excluded labour from decision-making and have created formidable obstacles to unionisation. Labour legislation allowing small groups of workers to establish a union has resulted in fragmentation of the labour movement, while successive governments in both countries have done little to enforce labour legislation protecting workers and to close loopholes allowing employers to suppress labour protest. Even when workers are willing or eager to associate themselves with the union movement, they face a number of direct and indirect obstacles, compounded by their weak position in the labour market. This is especially the case for women workers who in both countries are often found in vulnerable and insecure types of employment where labour organising is extremely difficult.

But while the exclusionary *effect* of industrial relations systems has been the same in both countries, the *means* have differed substantially. Workers in Thailand are likely to have benefited from the periods of relative freedom and democracy under civilian regimes that permitted union organising and collective bargaining. This may have enabled them to gain experience in unionisation, to engage in alliances with other social movements, and to expand their repertoires of protest vis-à-vis employers and the state. In Indonesia, in contrast, workers' organisations were for some three decades severely restricted in their efforts to educate and organise workers, and this role was largely taken over by new, independent NGOs. The absence of credible trade unions and the lack of access to reliable information about trade unions suggest that many workers are not familiar with the concept of trade unionism or are unwilling to put their trust in such organisations. For these general reasons, the ability and willingness of women workers to mobilise and organise collectively is likely to be higher in Thailand than in Indonesia. The earlier large-scale entry of women into the formal urban labour market in Thailand will probably strengthen this supposition.

However, ability and willingness to mobilise and organise are not only a result of labour regulation and position in the labour market. Whether or not women workers will form and join organisations to articulate their struggles – and how they respond to political developments – depends also on the nature of available organisations and the environment

in which they (can) operate and form alliances. The gender relations and regimes which women workers experience and in which their organisations operate furthermore shape the diverse grounds on which they might organise and the specific ways in which they try to do so. The next two chapters therefore address the political and gender environment of women workers in Thailand and Indonesia.

[1] A useful recent example is the controversy over the minimum wage during July-August 2004 (for a history of this issue see Manning 1998). The debate saw workers' coalitions such as the Jakarta-based Committee Against Workers' Oppression (KAPB) call for use of a "reasonable life necessities" index which would increase the minimum wage substantially, whereas the national employers' federation APINDO insisted on continued use of the "minimum life necessities" index. APINDO and the National Planning Agency proposed that the increase in the minimum wage as desired by workers' groups would lead to increased unemployment, and called on the Ministry of Labour and Transmigration to let employers and workers determine the minimum wage through bipartite negotiations. Workers' organisations throughout the country objected to this proposal, arguing that government intervention was necessary in the face of the weak legal and practical position of enterprise-based trade unions. In the end, the Minister of Labour and Transmigration chose to uphold the status quo with regard to the basis for determining the minimum wage (*Kompas* 29 July 2004; *Kompas* 10 August 2004).

[2] Jaded's view is shared by observers from other labour-related NGOs in Thailand. For example, the head of the Thai Labor Campaign (a Bangkok-based advocacy and research NGO) insists that workers who participate on labour-management committees are merely "brainwashed about the importance of attaining SA8000 status" even though this is only in the interest of the employers (in order to get more orders) rather than beneficial to the workers (presentation at Seminar on Codes of Conduct in the Textile Industry, 27 November 2001, Bangkok).

[3] This situation frequently occurs when management restricts the automatic deduction of union dues from workers' salaries, instead forcing union activists to conduct periodic visits to individual members in order to collect dues.

[4] As of late 2004, Thailand had not ratified ILO Conventions 103 or 183 on Maternity Protection.

[5] Personal interview Wannipa Paonoy, Bangkok, 24 January 2002.

[6] Personal interviews Tew, Bangkok 25 January 2002 and Arunee Srito, Bangkok 29 October 2001.

[7] According to a Labour Protection and Welfare Department report, 21,151 out of 44,783 dismissals were of women. The report did not specify what proportion of these dismissals were on grounds of union activism or were discriminatory in nature (*Bangkok Post* 28 February 2004).

[8] For a detailed description of Pancasila and its influence on the Indonesian Industrial Relations system, see Ford (1999, 2000) and Manning (1998).

[9] Observers note that it is likely President Habibie signed the ILO Conventions because it presented a relatively quick and easy way of appeasing labour in the aftermath of the riots of May 1998. However, he may not have intended to grant labour far-reaching legal rights (Ford 2000:14). Although subsequent administrations have passed the Trade Union and Manpower Acts of 2000 and 2003 respectively, the continuing unwillingness and/or inability of the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration to enforce these and other labour-related laws across the board raises doubts about any fundamental reform of the industrial relations system in Indonesia.

[10] The Industrial Relations Dispute Settlement Act of 2004 – which has less direct relevance to this discussion – represents an overhaul of the relevant institutions and clarifies the rights of each party to bring a case forward, to request mediation, and to appeal against decisions.

[11] Revised poverty line measurements indicate that some 15 per cent of the Thai population of 64 million (or around nine million people) are living in poverty, around half of them in the northeastern provinces which for decades have been a source of migrant labour (*Bangkok Post* 16 September 2004).

[13] Vicky Crinis, however, argues in her research on labour in Malaysia that the financial and economic crisis that hit Southeast and East Asia in 1997 brought unexpected benefits for trade unions in Malaysia: "The crisis caused a considerable change in the way workers view their job security and welfare benefits. A post-crisis backlash through restructuring has made workers more aware of the advantages of trade union membership. The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) is seen to be making advances for workers and the government has had to relent on some work-related policies" (2002:165).

[14] See Manning (1998) for a detailed assessment of variations in women's labour force participation over time in Java and the Outer Islands, in rural and urban areas and in various sectors of the economy.

[15] See Manning (2003) for a different interpretation according to which the Indonesian government's wage and termination policies for the modern sector "have an adverse effect on productivity, and could slow the creation of 'better' jobs and higher living standards" (2003:20).

[16] Manning, however, cautions that women may be more frequently described as unpaid family workers than men due to gender bias and given that ownership of a family company may be "invested in male hands" (1998:242).

[17] The absence of viable employment opportunities for women in rural areas stands in contrast to the large percentage of urban women who are paid workers. This reflects the availability in Indonesian cities of work in the service and industrial sectors which account for 22.4 and 65.5 per cent of women's jobs respectively. In rural areas, the primary sector still provides 66.4 per cent of all jobs for women (BPS 2003).

[18] See Chapter Five for details on gender and education in Thailand and Indonesia. As in other countries in the region, the significant differences in earnings by sex are most likely due to a combination of lower levels of experience; sex segregation and undervaluation of women's traditional occupations and of newly feminised occupations; women's frequently interrupted work life (due to family responsibilities); and direct discrimination on the basis of sex.

[19] After decades of increasing prosperity, the relative incidence of poverty has been on the rise again since the economic crisis of the late 1990s. Though estimates vary as a result of the variety of measurements used, it is safe to state that women are particularly at risk due to their lower educational attainment, their lower access to employment and social safety nets, and their greater social vulnerability. The Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) reports that between 1996 and 1999 the number of people living in poverty increased from 34 million to 48 million. In particular, the number of poor households headed by women grew from 710,000 to 1.03 million, which represents an increase of 45 per cent. This meant that of each 100 households headed by women, 15 were living in poverty in 1999, of which most were headed by women with very low levels of education (elementary level or less) (BPS 2000).

[20] For example, Suryomenggolo (2002) observes that permits from the Department of Labour can be 'bought' with relative ease; many companies fail to send the required monthly report about the implementation of their permit; and although the ordinance on night work must be displayed to and read by the workers, few workers effectively know their legal rights and dare to protest against violations.

Chapter 4 - Trade unions and social movements in Thailand and Indonesia

Introduction

The previous chapter analysed and compared labour regulation and labour legislation in Thailand and Indonesia, highlighting the different means employed by the state and employers to achieve exclusion of labour from decision-making processes. It argued that Thai workers may have had somewhat greater opportunities to experience collective mobilisation and organisation than Indonesia workers, since Thailand had known several periods of democratic governance during which labour rights were generally respected. That chapter also demonstrated the similarities between the two countries in terms of women's large-scale entry into urban formal employment, their position in vulnerable types of employment, and the common lack of enforcement of labour legislation where workers' protection is concerned. The latter two of these characteristics are important obstacles to effective mobilisation and organisation of women workers.

But the question of how important identities are to collective mobilising and organising by women workers in these two countries cannot be answered by considering only economic developments. Freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively have historically been closely linked not only to economic developments and factory organisation but also to prevailing local, national, and regional political arrangements and formations. The configuration and relative strength of the labour movement – while the result of a large array of forces – have been the subject of struggles both within the state and between the state and civil society, the military and business circles. As Andrew Brown concludes from his extensive analysis of secondary sources in both Thai and English, "the capacity of workers to emerge and re-emerge as political actors ... can only be understood in relation to the character of the state, regime and political space in particular historical conjunctures" (2004:133).

Moreover, the political space available for the development and expression of particular identities is uneven and subject to political developments such as regime change, democratisation processes, cross-border ties, and political alignments between social movements and communities. This chapter argues that as a result of maneuvering by political parties and economic elites but also due to their own weaknesses, trade unions in Thailand and Indonesia until the 1990s were incapable of linking with other social or oppositional movements. This has significantly weakened their ability to appeal to groups other than labour and to address cross-cutting issues such as gender inequality.

This chapter starts with an analysis of social movements in Thailand and Indonesia which explores and compares in particular the linkages and alliances between trade unions and other social movements. The next section highlights one particular social movement, the women's movement, and questions to what extent women's movements or organisations have addressed (or have the potential to address) labour issues. This is followed by a brief exploration of the role of women in politics. The remainder of the chapter is concerned with a comparison between Thailand and Indonesia regarding the nature and extent of trade unionism.

Social movements

Chapter Two noted the emergence throughout the world of new social movements that are based primarily on fluid identities rather than material interests. It also noted that opinions are divided as to whether trade unions can be called new social movements that work towards the shaping of social practices. Have trade unions in Thailand and Indonesia become integrated into public institutions, as Castells (1997) argued, and absorbed into anti-globalisation movements? Or are trade unions increasingly engaged in struggles over meaning and do they "build a new identity that redefines their position in society" (Castells 1997:8)? This section explores the connections between trade unions and other social movements in Thailand and Indonesia.

Thailand

While civil society organisations have been active for decades in Thailand (e.g. trade unions, women's professional organisations, religious associations, etc) the networks that some of these organisations establish in the form of social movements are of relatively recent origin. The appearance and spectacular rise of social movements observed during the 1990s has been due in part to rising economic inequalities and the inadequacies of Thai parliamentary democracy: "The failure of representative democracy to provide any meaningful representation for poor and marginal groups has prompted many agitational campaigns" (Pasuk 2002:15). It can thus be argued that it was precisely those groups that felt most excluded from the workings of parliamentary democracy that engaged in social movements, such as farmers, ethnic minorities, and women workers from lower income-groups. With respect to these movements, Pasuk notes that they "mobilise concepts of culture and identity to build solidarity and inspire action" (2002:16) but with reference to "universally acceptable concepts" rather than exclusive markers of identity, thereby facilitating alliances with other groups and support from the general public.

Pasuk's observation applies perhaps more to environmental, women's, and so-called people's movements than to trade unions. Most Thai trade unions have not tried to align themselves with increasingly active social movements during the 1990s and have in fact been slow to recognise and learn from the shift from occasional popular protest against the state to sustained networks agitating around multiple issues. This stands in sharp contrast to trade unions' earlier periods of radical activism, in particular the democratic interlude of 1973-1976. This period witnessed a successful challenge by students and other civil society groups against the military government and a subsequent short-lived explosion of political activism by a large variety of groups and individuals. According to Napaporn:

> Social movement unionism developed as the dominant form of the trade union movement from October 1973 to October 1976, with three components: defence of the common interests of the working class, class collective action, and participation in the movements for broad social objectives. Economic unionism developed to replace social movement unionism in the post-1976 period. Trade unions turned to emphasize only the defence of the workers' common interests and distanced themselves from movements for broad social objectives (2002:80).

For example, the democratic interlude saw one strike in early 1976 in which unions won widespread popular support because their demand for lower food prices moved beyond (though included) the traditional interests of the working class (Napaporn 2002:85).

Harsh authoritarian rule in the late 1970s and the slow return to democracy during the 1980s meant that the trade union movement was forced to regroup its strength and its membership base. The "labourist wing" concerned with expanding labour's influence in a stable, capitalist system gained the upper hand (with encouragement from the state and capital), whereas the "more radical stream" which criticised the capitalist system and sought to overthrow it, was gradually weeded out through repressive measures by the military (Brown 2004:83). Simultaneously, the rapid increase in manufacturing employment spawned new, area-based trade union groups that challenged the legitimacy and efficiency of the increasingly fractured national trade union congresses. Legislation limiting trade unions to discussion of and struggle around economic issues and granting workers only limited rights to discuss political issues through the nascent parliamentary democracy in turn contributed to the isolation of trade unions from most other oppositional movements in Thai society. Thus, the contrast between alliances in the mid-1970s and the relative isolation of trade unions in the 1980s can be attributed to economic and political strategies by the state aimed at containment and depoliticisation of labour movements. The weak position of the labour movement and its focus on basic worker rights (as opposed to broader political rights) were a result of the exclusionary system of labour control that developed after 1976.[1]

In the 1990s, in contrast, a younger generation of trade union leaders started to explore new avenues of organising in response to a perceived sense of crisis in the labour movement (Brown 2004:113-4). One of the clearest manifestations of their resolve was their taking up of occupational safety and health (OSH) as a union priority in response to a string of large industrial accidents.[2] In particular, the Kader toy factory fire in 1993 that claimed 188 lives, including 159 women workers, caused by negligence on the part of employers and managers and the absence of safety equipment and training, galvanised trade unionists into action. The resulting collective action around safety and health issues is notable for two reasons. First, as Brown argues, "the health and safety crisis has been seen to be partly the result of the ineffectiveness and weakness of existing labour organisations" (2001:133).

Even when enterprise-based unions were fully aware of health and safety shortcomings in their workplace, they were generally unable to push for changes. Secondly, the Kader accident "furthered the resolve of some and convinced them of the utmost importance of regrouping and rebuilding organisations that would have a greater capacity" amongst other things to defend workers' class interests (Brown 2001:134). Yet, more relevant for this analysis is the related fact that the Kader fire generated new alliances that went beyond traditional class interests and were at times "outside the officially sanctioned parameters of labour organisation" (2001:138).

Integral to these new alliances is the launch of a campaign to assist Kader fire victims in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. This led to the establishment later the same year of a Committee for Assisting Kader Employees, a Health and Safety Campaign Committee, and a Council of Work and Environment Related Patients' Network of Thailand (WEPT). Whereas Brown emphasises these committees' demands for workers' participation in decision-making around issues of health and safety and the challenge to centralised bureaucracy that this constituted, Napaporn (2002) calls attention to the new alliances formed in the process between workers, academics, medical professionals, and networks of rural poor. Central to these alliances was a new degree of cooperation and collaboration between workers and other social groups and a focus on issues other than wage demands that had during most of the 1980s been the main preoccupation of trade unions in the industrialised sectors.

Especially noteworthy in this respect is WEPT joining the Assembly of the Poor in 1996. Formally established in 1995, the Assembly of the Poor is a country-wide network of poor peoples' organisations and action groups whose aim is to challenge the government's development policies and projects (Missingham 2003). Although the Assembly's most well-known campaigns are in the fields of forestry and rural environmental damage, it also includes as its allies groups of urban poor and fishing people, aside from sufferers of occupational diseases. The importance of these developments is captured by Napaporn who argues that:

> The formation of a broad-based coalition highlighted the limitations of the trade unions' role in the OSH campaign. Trade unions in the 1990s are organizations of the relatively powerless. They cannot derive significant power from their members. They achieve success

> as campaigning organizations only when they cultivate alliances with other social movements whose aims overlap with the unions' demands (2002:99).

Thus, while in the days of democracy in the 1970s workers had actively supported the struggles of students' and peasants' movements, in the 1990s OSH concerns compelled trade union activists to seek support from other movements. This, in turn, required them to re-examine their agenda, strategies, membership, and ultimately their position as a movement. The involvement of workers' groups in the Assembly of the Poor is not the only example of workers and trade union activists venturing again into broader activism and discovering the strength of alliances. Chapter Five discusses the ninety-days maternity leave campaign by union women in the early 1990s, and the ways in which they drew on new alliances in order to press for protection of pregnant women in the workforce in general. Similar to the OSH campaign, this campaign sought a broader support base and covered issues on which alliances across and beyond economic sectors were possible (Brown 2004).[3]

Cross-sectoral or cross-class alliances raise the question of the role of NGOs. Whether as principle actors or supporting organisations, NGOs are an important aspect of social movements. With regard to the campaigns on maternity leave and OSH, as well as the 1990 campaign on social security, it is important to note that both international and local NGOs offered a wide range of support. One consequence of their financial and technical involvement was the increased standing of informal and unofficial labour organisations that proved to be more effective in addressing workers' concerns than the formal labour councils or federations. As Voravidh et al. write, "it is a positive development to see that some international organisations, in particular ACILS [the American Center for Labour Solidarity] and FES [the German Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung], changed their methods of solidarity support from emphasising only the formal organisations to focusing more attention on the organisations that have real power bases and could mobilize workers' collective actions" (n.d.:15). Nevertheless, according to Missingham (2003) and my own interviews with women workers, many Thai activists in diverse social movements remain concerned about the inequalities between social movement members and NGO supporters in terms of access to media and information.

In sum, political changes in Thailand during the past thirty years first encouraged radical trade unionism during the mid-1970s, then limited the labour movement to a focus on economic issues during much of the 1980s, and encouraged trade unions to engage in alliances with other social and oppositional movements during the 1990s. Napaporn (2002) has argued that trade unions have vacillated between social movement unionism and economic unionism depending on their responses to the external political environment in Thailand and internationally. However, it is worthwhile remembering that such responses are also shaped by the presence or absence of effective social movements and NGOs with similar goals, and by the legitimisation of the discourses of these diverse actors by the state and the media. The emergence during the 1990s of alliances between trade unions and other social movements can therefore be regarded as the combined effect of political opportunities and economic restructuring: that is, the opportunity for trade unions to remain relevant and overcome internal weaknesses by forming strategic alliances across sectors and type of employment.

Indonesia

Similar to Thailand, Indonesian workers have also explored alliances outside the workplace during the 1990s, though continuous labour repression until recently made this process more difficult and less obvious than in Thailand. The trajectory of social movement development in Indonesia reads like a constant contestation over the amount and the nature of political space granted by the authoritarian Suharto regime, though Ganie-Rochman (2002) emphasises the influence exerted by NGOs in the political process during the 1990s despite being constrained by governing mechanisms. Since the start in 1998 of efforts towards political reform, coalitions of NGOs and other civil society organisations such as church organisations, student groups, consumer protection groups, legal rights bodies, and professional interest associations have made their presence felt in media, decision-making processes, and the public sphere in general.

However, unlike Pasuk's (2002) assertion of Thai poor and marginal people organising because of their under-representation in politics, Indonesia has yet to witness large-scale, sustained campaigns by marginalised people at a national or regional level, despite the exclusion of large sections of its population from local and national decision-making.

According to popular opinion, many Indonesians are apolitical or are not yet used to (and fearful of) challenging political figures held in high esteem. However, it is equally likely that the lack of political education during the New Order years, the relatively recent emergence of lobby organisations, and the recent changes towards regional autonomy have left many people – including workers – unsure of how and where to start influencing the political system.

The particular trajectory of trade union development in Indonesia and the changing nature of trade union-NGO relationships also account for the relative absence of workers from emerging social movements since the start of Reformasi. By necessity, most genuine efforts at organising workers and defending their rights during the 1980s and 1990s were carried out in secrecy and outside of the state-controlled (F)SPSI. As a result, workers in labour-intensive industries often sought help from or were approached by local NGOs and informal study or solidarity groups which offered legal education, literacy classes, legal assistance, and general solidarity.

In the arena of industrialised labour, low wages and generally appalling working conditions gave rise to a sharp increase in strike action (Kammen 1997) and gradually encouraged community-based organising (Hadiz 1997, 2001). The best known among the new groupings and networks established during the 1990s were the Solidarity Independent Workers' Union (Serikat Buruh Merdeka Setiakawan or SBM Setiakawan) formed in 1990 and involved in a range of activities such as workers' education, training programmes and discussion groups; the Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union (Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia or SBSI) formed in 1992 by well-known labour lawyer Mochtar Pakpahan and other intellectuals, many of whom were arrested in due course; and the Centre for the Struggle of Indonesian Workers (Pusat Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia or PPBI) formed in 1994 through the initiative of militant students and activists, whose leader Dita Indah Sari would later be imprisoned by the Suharto regime.

During the 1990s, the relationship between these pioneer, independent trade unions and labour NGOs was at times tense, given their difference in objectives and strategies.[4] The labour NGOs that constituted the independent labour movement were themselves characterised by divergent strategies, with some focusing on policy advocacy and others

concentrating on "legal advocacy, workers' education and associated activities" (Ford 2000:12). Despite these divides, many workers' organisations benefited from financial and technical assistance from NGOs and progressive student organisations. They acted either to challenge the political and social exclusion of the poor in a broad sense (such as the PPBI), or to push the boundaries of political space for workers to express their demands collectively (for example the SBM and SBSI) (Hadiz 2001:120). In both scenarios, workers' organisations went beyond narrowly defined class interests to seek support among other communities such as home-based workers, students and academics, and a variety of domestic and international NGOs. Thus, some seeds for social movement unionism were sown during the 1990s when formal organising through independent trade unions was nearly impossible because of state repression.

In contrast, the post-Suharto era has seen linkages between workers and other social groups weakened, in part due to the resurgence of official unionism. With the new ability to register officially and to receive overseas funding, trade unions (and federations) appear to have less incentive to seek support from NGOs, while Ford also points out that several high-profile labour NGOs and activists shifted to other issues:

> [P]olicy-oriented labour NGOs, which had been part of a privileged domain of semi-tolerated opposition in the late New Order, experienced a crisis in membership and direction as a result of the expansion of political space and the disintegration of the government machine. During *Reformasi*, middle-class activists who had used labour issues to voice their more generalised feelings of dissent were able to express that dissent directly (2000:20).

In addition to the wave of new political issues put forward by reform-minded activists, Ford also reports reduced general interest in labour issues and the weakening of policy and advocacy NGOs due to uncertainty about their modus operandi in these new political circumstances (2000:21). The same may be said about the student groups that in the years before 1998 actively supported workers' education and organising activities. With Reformasi opening up old and new issues for activism (ranging from corruption to military influence in politics to the environment), student groups have shown relatively little interest in labour issues in recent years. On the other hand, it should be noted that activists and leaders associated with mainstream, large trade unions during the past six years have seldom reached out to or supported social movements such as the environment, anti-

corruption, women's, or pro-poor movements. Thus, it can be concluded that the seeds were sown for social movement unionism in Indonesia but that political developments – especially the nature of state-imposed constraints during the 1990s and the shifting advocacy and policy priorities of the early 2000s – have, perhaps temporarily, halted any deepening of alliances beyond class-based (or single-issue) groupings.

Comparison

During the 1990s, both countries saw an increase in social movements and social movement organisations, as well as in collaboration between workers' organisations and social movements. The latter ranged from farmers and students to popular and political protest movements mobilising against authoritarianism. In both countries, workers' organisations explored new alliances, albeit for different reasons. Thai unionists seeking alliances with occupational health and safety and anti-poverty groups were concerned with the need to revitalise the labour movement and maintain its relevance. In contrast, some of the fledgling, semi-legal workers' organisations in Indonesia broadened their protest on labour issues in an effort to call attention to the general political and social exclusion of the poor. Hence, both countries have witnessed examples of social movement unionism, based on cross-movement alliances that went beyond class interests.

Yet, in Thailand such alliances appear to have been easier to maintain than in Indonesia. Thai workers' organisations continue to advocate on behalf of unemployed workers, people infected with HIV-AIDS, and workers with occupational diseases. In Indonesia, on the other hand, attention shifted away from labour issues in the aftermath of Reformasi and few trade unions are engaged in alliances with social movements. This is surprising, since trade unions in both countries are threatened by lack of unity, economic restructuring, and ineffective enforcement of labour laws. Social movement theories suggest that, aside from political opportunities, the emergence of alliances between movements depend on the compatibility of the identities on which they are based. Thus, it is possible that the Thai workers' movement emerged from identities that are more easily aligned with those activated by other social movements, whereas in Indonesia there is a divergence of identities between the trade union movement and other current social movements. This possible explanation will be examined in more detail throughout the following chapters.

Women's movements

Analysing and comparing the position of women in workers' organisations raises the question of women's movements in Thailand and Indonesia. Are these movements largely formal or informal? Are they political and/or social movements? To what extent and on what issues do women's organisations form alliances? With which individuals or organisations do they do so and how? Do these actors politicise the same issues and do they do so in similar language? The following section will offer a brief analysis of women's movements in Thailand and Indonesia, with particular attention to their areas of focus and their strategies in recent years.

Thailand

Although women's issues had already been on the agenda of urban, educated elites since the late nineteenth century (Barme 1999), the Thai women's movement first emerged in the 1930s when a small group of urban, upper-class women lobbied for better protection and rights in marriage and for the extension of educational opportunities for women and girls. Such agitation on the part of educated and well-established women involved the establishment of women's clubs, newspapers, and magazines, and continued in the 1950s and 1960s. According to gender and law expert Virada Somswasdi, this activism "did not touch upon any societal patriarchal structural problems or gender equality" and was thus divorced from the realities faced by most low-income women in Thailand (2003:4). Jeffrey (2002) relates such elite sentiments about women's equality throughout modern Thai history to the class divisions in Thai society:

> Various women sought to engage in the political process, in interpreting and reinterpreting political reality to further women's interests and to promote women's equality. Elite women, in particular, were able to draw upon their position as guarantors of national identity in order to make claims for women's equality. In doing so, however, they strengthened the disciplinary hold of national identity over other women, particularly prostitute women. Elite women gained political voice through their role in disciplining other women ... into the "correct cultural role" (2002:147-8).

Jeffrey in her detailed study of prostitution policy in Thailand points out that gender has been central to the state's project of building a national identity since the early days of the

Siamese (and later Thai) state: "Female identity has been viewed in terms of cultural and national identity" (2002:153). The Thai women's movement and Thai women's organisations have in various ways been implicated in this project of constructing acceptable female behaviour, most notably in debates around prostitution but equally so in their various campaigns, which have legitimised certain gender identities while silencing others.

The 1973 popular uprising and the influence of leftist activists resulted in the emergence of a more progressive women's movement that prioritised gender-oriented struggles around issues such as abortion, divorce, education, and bodily integrity. The confrontational politics of this period produced growing radicalism and political polarisation within and between movement organisations (Prudhisan and Mitprasat 1997). Although this women's movement died down in the aftermath of the 1976 coup d'etat, the 1980s and 1990s saw relaxation of government controls over civil society, resulting in the establishment of a number of feminist women's organisations concerned with the participation and rights of grassroots women, including prostitute women (Jeffrey 2002:80-3, 119-24). Democratisation processes during the 1990s enabled these and more recently established organisations to pursue further reforms such as the extension of maternity leave and legislation on prostitution and trafficking of women and children. This focus on legal rights for women regardless of class position culminated in the lobbying efforts of the Women and Constitution Network to ensure gender sensitivity in the 1997 Constitution (Virada 2003:5-8). Prudhisan and Mitprasat note that environmental and anti-poverty movements face increasing challenges to balance demands for political advocacy with direct action for grassroots constituents, yet little is known about whether and how women's groups and movements are dealing with such challenges.

Gender equality and women's empowerment remain contested terms for much of the mainstream women's movement. A great deal of popular discussion about gender equality as reported in the print media remains couched in terms of protection of the rights of women and children, and many elite women activists and female politicians express continued concern for women's protection from vice and crime rather than promotion of women's political and economic empowerment. They thus perpetuate the distinction between good women/bad women, which has left parts of the Thai women's movement

unable or unwilling to link economic and sexual exploitation while respecting women's agency in their search for work. In sum, the mainstream Thai women's movement has at many times in its history been dominated by elite concerns for legal reform and the defence of traditional ideals of Thai womanhood rather than guided by the priorities expressed by rural and low-income women, be they material, legal, or discursive.

Indonesia

The Indonesian women's movement dates back to the early part of the twentieth century when women's organisations first appeared with the goal of improving women's education, status in marriage, and role in the public domain. In 1928, at the first National Women's Congress in Yogjakarta in which thirty-one women's organisations from all over the country participated, twenty women's organisations established an umbrella organisation by the same name. During the next two decades, the goal of women's emancipation became increasingly entwined with efforts for national independence, leading many women's organisations to support the fight against colonial rule. Rai (2002b:35-39) reminds us that this alignment of women's and liberation movements did not always benefit women, as the independence struggle often took precedence over addressing women's issues.

In the years following Indonesia's independence in 1949, women's mass organisations such as Gerwani (Indonesian Women's Movement, which was aligned with the Communist Party) and Muslimat (the women's wing of the mass Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Ulama) continued to address women's practical and strategic interests (Indar Parawansa 2002; Blackburn 2004). Especially Gerwani (established in1950 as Gerwis or Movement of Conscious Indonesian Women) actively sought to represent poor women workers: "Unlike other women's organizations, Gerwani had a clear notion of labour exploitation based on Marxism. It aimed to participate in women's struggles for daily needs and for their rights" (Blackburn 2004:178; see also Wieringa 2002:153). Among the issues raised by Gerwani were women's right to equal wages, promotion and training courses, family allowance, and equal share rations to men's; and for women in informal work, the need to earn sufficient wages, access to credit, and lower taxes. Gerwani's activities extended from the fulfillment of basic material needs to mass mobilization of women workers and political and leadership training (Blackburn 2004:178-9).

Gerwani's attention to the needs of poor women workers in both informal and formal jobs, together with its alliances with both trade unions and mainstream women's organisations, makes it a unique organisation. Wieringa (2002) argues that it was able to form these alliances because it did not challenge traditional notions of women's identity as wives and mothers, either in the workforce or in trade unions and other organisations, or the sexual division of labour in the workplace or household. Gerwani's activism came to an abrupt end due to the 1965 change of regime, after which women's issues became increasingly marginalised.

As part of its control over civil society under the policy of "single-vehicle interest representation" (Ford 2002), the New Order regime after 1966 allowed only state-sponsored women's organisations to operate such as the Family Welfare Movement (PKK) and Dharma Wanita. As Indar Parawansa argues, "these organisations were designed to allow wives to further their husbands' careers, and were an important vehicle for government propaganda on development" (2002:71). This reflects the dominant gender regime in the 1970s and 1980s that portrayed women as wives and mothers and as contributors to (though not main beneficiaries of) national development. This is not to say that women did not benefit from the activities carried out by state-sponsored organisations. But by reproducing patriarchal values in its policies and programmes, the New Order regime undermined women's decision-making in the household and curtailed women's role in economic development and in politics more broadly. While reaffirming women's rights and opportunities in the public sphere, recognition in state policy of women's double role (i.e. household duties and employment outside the household) in the 1980s served in large part to increase women's burden (Oey-Gardiner 2002:103; Blackburn 2004:182). Although Sen (1998) argues that in the late New Order period women were increasingly recognised as producers and consumers in both the private and public sphere, the ideological expansion of their legitimate roles did not increase women's decision-making power or their political participation.

During the 1990s, women's organisations in Indonesia increasingly extended the scope of their activities from social welfare to political and economic support. In part, this extension is a reflection of the emergence of independent and politically oriented women's NGOs in

response to the gradual weakening of the New Order regime. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the growth of politically oriented NGOs which allowed middle-class Indonesians to play a part in political and social activism (Ford 2002:15; Blackburn 2004:183). The women's NGOs amongst these new organisations were probably also influenced by growing cross-border linkages between women's groups and the emerging human rights and gender discourses circulating worldwide as a result of international conferences and meetings. Most of the women's NGOs active on labour issues in the 1980s and 1990s can be characterised as secular feminist organisations. These include: YASANTI (Annisa Swasti Foundation), Solidaritas Perempuan untuk Hak Asasi Manusia (Women's Solidarity for Human Rights), Lembaga Bantuan Hukum – Asosiasi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan (Legal Aid Institute – Association of Indonesian Women for Justice), and Yayasan Perempuan Mardhika (Foundation for Independent Women).

During the 1990s (and especially in response to the violence of May 1998), the number of NGOs concerned with violence against women and human rights also grew quickly, as a further sign of women's ongoing challenges to the New Order.[5] Many of these NGOs actively collaborate with the state-sponsored but independent National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan). Finally, the establishment of the Women's Studies Programme at the University of Indonesia in 1992 is likely to have encouraged a new generation of women activists in the social and political fields.

Although many women's NGOs appear to be (or have become) professional advocacy and support organisations, grassroots women still play an important role in the Indonesian women's movement. The Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Coalition) is noteworthy for its grassroots membership and its insistence on weaving together of local, national, and global issues since its emergence in 1998. Also worth emphasising is the role played by the Voice of Concerned Mothers (SIP) during the 1998 protests against then President Suharto. SIP called attention to the government's economic policies and their adverse effects on women and children. In subsequent years, SIP has continued its activities at the grassroots, encouraging women to see their traditional concerns in a political context (Bianpoen 2000a). Budianta argues that rather than a break with the past, such activism points to "the upsurge of grassroots processes of resistance, and strategies of evasion and

negotiation [vis-à-vis the New Order regime] that had been going on within the existing structures" (2002:36). Such resistance is continued in diverse organisational forms:

> For the purposes of immediate struggle, women often use loosely formed, short-term alliances represented by 'disposable' names ... Sometimes these groups solidify into a more formal structure. While in the previous era, non-governmental activities generally took the form of *yayasan* (charitable foundations), women at present are more versatile in finding different forms that suit their different needs, such as associations, unions or federations (Budianta 2002:41).

In response to the rise of regional cultural identity and religious fundamentalism with potentially adverse effects on women, Budianta argues that women's groups are increasingly emphasising religious tolerance, empowerment of women in regional contexts, and using the power of motherhood to mobilise women into activism. She concludes that "women's activism in the post-*Reformasi* era has used identities not as essentialist pigeon-holes but as strategies of cultural and political positioning" (2002:48).

Efforts at political reform since 1998 have also brought about increased collaboration between women's NGOs and a variety of other movements, most noticeably about violence against women but also including some issues pertaining directly to women workers. Issues concerning sexual violence at the workplace and migrant women workers have particularly received their attention.[6] Blackburn argues that this concern stems largely from concerns over morality and (in the case of overseas domestic workers) national honour: "One of the aspects of migrant labour which reverberates most strongly with women's organizations is that which links it in their minds to sexual rather than sheer economic exploitation" (2004:191). She therefore concludes that "few Indonesian women's organizations have addressed questions of economic exploitation" because "for middle-class and Islamic organizations, assumptions about men being the main income-earner prevailed, making the notion of exploitation rather irrelevant as far as women were concerned, unless it impinged on matters of sexual morality" (2004:193). More recently, however, several women's organisations have become active in networks to combat both sexual and economic exploitation of women workers. In conclusion, the Indonesian women's movement – as it is reflected in women's NGOs and state-sponsored institutions – has clearly experienced a transformation in the 1990s by becoming more politically oriented than was previously allowed and by taking up issues of social and economic justice.

Comparison

The above discussion of women's movements reveals that the mainstream Thai women's movement has throughout its history focused more prominently on issues of concern to elite women than on the needs of grassroots women. In Indonesia, in contrast, a more broad-based women's movement emerged during the late 1980s and 1990s which advocated diverse social, political, and economic changes, including many concerning the rights and conditions of women workers. Although this brief discussion does not do justice to the rich history of women's movements in both countries, it can be concluded that the broad-based nature of the mainstream women's movement in Indonesia appears to hold greater potential for alliances than in Thailand, because it permits greater focus on cross-cutting issues of concern to a wide range of women and women' groups. To what extent women's movements have indeed entered into alliances with or otherwise supported women workers' organisations will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

Women in politics

The above analysis suggests that women's movements in the two countries are substantially different in their outlook and alliances. One location from which women's movements and their leaders have the potential to influence policies and legislation (and therefore indirectly the potential for women to organise) is formal politics. How have women in the two countries fared in formal politics in recent years? Although the number of women leaders in local and national politics remains low in both countries, political liberalisation together with increased educational attainment has helped a small number of women gain entry into the traditionally male reserve of formal politics. In both countries, women have had to overcome significant barriers to engage in politics and have increasingly combined politics with activism on women's and gender issues.

Thailand

Thai women have had the right to vote or stand for election since 1932, but the first woman was elected to parliament in 1949. Furthermore, it was only in 1982 that women won the

right to become village and subdistrict heads through the Local Administration Act (Yoddumnern-Attig et al. 1992:78). As a result of such discriminatory legislation, few women had gained sufficient experience in politics to be able to enter national politics unless with the help of a male family member. The percentage of female parliamentarians has not risen above 10 per cent (see Table 4.1 below), while the percentage of female candidates for parliamentary elections reached 15.6 per cent in 1996, according to the National Statistical Office (NSO). In 1999, women accounted for 2.6 per cent of provincial governors, 0.1 per cent of district chief officers, 8 per cent of directors of district, and (in 1996) 1.6 per cent of village heads (NSO 2004). Clearly, public representation is still considered a male domain that women have only recently started to challenge.

Table 4.1 Women in parliament (House of Representatives) in Thailand, 1986-2004

Year of election	*Total number*	*Number of women*	*Percentage of women*
July 1986	347	12	3.5
July 1988	357	10	2.8
March 1992	360	12	4.2
September 1992	360	15	4.2
July 1995	391	24	6.1
November 1996	393	22	5.6
January 2001	500	48	9.6

Source: NSO (2003b).

Pasuk (2002) observes that Thai women have taken a leading role in many recently emerged social movements. Groups and networks such as the Assembly of the Poor, the support group for sufferers of occupational diseases, and those fighting for better urban housing count many women in their leadership ranks. Amongst others, the extensive advocacy efforts by Khunying Supatra Masdit, then Minister in the Prime Minister's Office for Women, in the lead-up to and during the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) also helped to increase the visibility of women in politics and to call attention to gender issues in Thailand. Thus, while the percentage of women in formal politics remains relatively low, the ability and willingness of a number of women politicians to speak out about gender inequality suggests that these women could potentially influence the ability of women workers to mobilise and organise collectively.

Indonesia

In Indonesia, women's right to vote and to be elected is guaranteed in the 1945 Constitution, but it was only in 1950 that the first woman was appointed to parliament. During the New Order years (1966-1998), the exclusionary nature of the political system prevented most ordinary women (i.e. those without business or family relations to the Suharto family or sanctioned political parties) from contesting political office. Although the percentage of women in parliament was relatively high during the later years of the New Order regime, their influence varied. Concerning women parliamentarians during the New Order regime, the Asia Foundation describes their presence as "based on charity rather than political will", as "relating to their occupation and their husband's career", and as "an elite group promoting themselves, their party and their political career" (Soetjipto 2000:452). More recently, during the 2004 elections the percentage of women in parliament increased again to more than 10 per cent (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Women in parliament (House of Representatives) in Indonesia, 1987-2004

Year of election	*Total number*	*Number of women*	*Percentage of women*
1987	500	65	13
1992	500	62	12.4
1997	500	54	10.8
1999	500	46	9.2
2004	550	61	11.1

Source: UNDP 2004; CETRO (quoted in *Jakarta Post* 8 May 2004).

Similar to Thailand, Indonesian women lead many of the most active and successful civil society organisations, although in this case it is NGOs rather than networks where women predominate. The presence of women in NGOs is in part the result of the relatively small number of urban and widespread social movements, which is in itself an outcome of the New Order regime's stringent controls over civil society. Aside from making women-specific demands, women throughout Indonesia spearhead protests against evictions of squatter settlements, against corruption, and in favour of better urban planning.

The impact on politics of women's activism in social movements, on the other hand, is becoming increasingly clear. Bianpoen (2000a) believes that Indonesian women have "brought new life into politics" by encouraging women to see their traditional concerns as closely related to politics. As is evident from their candidatures for the 2004 national and

local elections in Indonesia, a small number of women activists from civil society organisations are also aware of the possibility of pursuing their particular goals through the political system. Most notably, this involved advocates of women's rights (Nursyahbani Katjasungkana and Eva Kusuma Sundari) and HIV/AIDS issues (Nurul Arifin). Although the percentage of women in parliament increased only marginally between 1999 and 2004[7], the direct and democratic election of women with experience in public activism will likely make a difference in the long run to the process and outcome of politics. Arguably, the defeat of former president Megawati Soekarnoputri in the 2004 elections shows that many ordinary Indonesians saw her in a similar light to women parliamentarians during the New Order. Although the impact of recently elected women will not be known for some time, it will almost certainly be greater than that of the women in the previous parliaments.

Comparison

The percentage of women elected to political office is similar in Thailand and Indonesia, but represents a significant increase in recent decades in Thailand. In Indonesia, on the other hand, it is not so much the percentage but the quality and qualifications of women politicians that attract attention. The election of women activists to parliament could have a positive effect on women workers' organising in the long run, as women workers may be able to count on political support for their struggles and may see women politicians as examples of women in public life and public activism.

Women are also taking up positions in similar kinds of social movements in the two countries. That women are increasingly active in these particular social movements is not surprising. In contrast to formal politics where women's representation and participation is low and is constrained by male-biased party rules, social movement politics in many countries offers women opportunities to explore their managerial and leadership talents. At the same time, it is precisely because social movements address issues of direct (and often vital) importance to women that relatively large numbers of women engage in protests and other forms of collective action. As Kaplan (1997) argues, women around the world are frequently persuaded to take action when their ability as mothers and wives to provide for their families is threatened by the state or other actors. Although no research has been done yet in Thailand or Indonesia with the specific aim to investigate women's motivation in

social movement activism, there is no reason to assume that the above-mentioned incentives are not valid for Thai or Indonesian women.

The presence of these women activists in politics does not mean that all women have equal access to political positions. Yet, it would be too pessimistic to say, as does Saptari in the Indonesian context, that women's protest is ineffectual as long as the deeper causes of women's secondary social status have not been addressed (1995:172). While class barriers to political office remain high (for example, in the form of funding and educational requirements and party endorsement), political action by elite women may slowly reinforce the image of women belonging to and having a rightful stake in the sphere of politics and public policy. Furthermore, some women politicians challenge and ultimately contribute to changing dominant gender norms and values for all women regardless of their socio-economic position, as the 2004 law on violence against women in Indonesia has shown. Thus, in both countries the emergence of new women politicians with an interest in social movement activism is an important development that can contribute to the legitimacy and effectiveness of women's activism in the public sphere.

Trade unions

Although trade unions in Thailand and Indonesia have at times engaged in what has been called social movement unionism – in other words struggles beyond material and class-based interests – as institutions many are relatively powerless vis-à-vis the state and employers. Trade union federations are frequently weakened by their lack of democratic structures or, if those exist, by the lack of implementation of democratic decision-making rules and regulations. This, in turn, has a negative impact on women's mobilisation in trade unions. On the other hand, to some extent these serious shortcomings on the part of the trade union movement are themselves a reflection of the changing macro-economic environment that severely limits not only union opportunities for action, but also the bargaining power of workers in general (Thomas 1995; Munck 2000a; Hadiz 2002). Thus, this section argues that the obstacles facing women in trade unions originate not only in the political opportunity structure and economic environment, but also in the institutional design and culture of trade unions as mobilising structures. This section first assesses the strengths and weaknesses of trade unions from a numerical and institutional perspective.

Secondly, it addresses some of the barriers within trade unions to women's participation and leadership.

Thailand

At present, Thailand counts 9 formal national labour union councils (see Table 4.3 below), and some 11 industrial- and area-based coordination centres which do not have formal status with the government but function as active geographic or industry-wide networks. In addition to these organisations, workers have also formed a new network, the Thai Labour Solidarity Committee, consisting of 28 organisations from among labour unions in private and state enterprises and NGOs (Voravidh et al n.d.:11). A second major network, the Women Workers' Unity Group (WWUG), will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Six. Private sector enterprise unions include both single-enterprise and industrial unions. A 1999 survey by the Arom Pongpangan Foundation estimates that the more than 1000 enterprise unions in the private sector have an average membership of 257 people and cover 2.79 per cent of all private sector employees (quoted in Brown, Bundit and Hewison 2002:25). It should be noted that approximately only half of these unions actually exist and have members, as many others were established by union leaders in efforts to gain seats on tripartite committees involving representatives from government, workers' and employers' organisations (Brown, Bundit and Hewison 2002:24). State enterprise unions in contrast have an average of 3,820 members and cover 52.6 per cent of workers in this sector.

Table 4.3: Number of formal labour organisations in Thailand (September 2003)

Type of organisation	*Number of organisations*
State enterprise labour union	46
Private sector labour union	1256
Labour union federation	19
Labour union council	9

Source: Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour.

The weakening power of the labour movement since the 1970s in spite of a rapidly growing industrialised and concentrated labour force is not only due to effects of neo-liberal capitalist employment policies. Instead, trade union leadership has assisted in its own fragmentation by pursuing individual power and competing for lucrative positions on various tripartite bodies set up by the state (Brown 2004:101-5). For example, under Thai labour legislation each trade union (regardless of its membership size) has one vote in the election of associate labour judges and members of tripartite labour committees. Thus, some 571 unions – many of them allegedly established by (or at the behest of) employers – were in early 2004 vying for 100 positions as associate judges, in contrast to 188 employer groups (*Bangkok Post* 9 February 2004).

Such power struggles especially impact on women workers, as gender bias among leaders restricts their access to these and other positions. They may stimulate some women workers to form their own alternative organisations, while others may disengage because of their dislike for trade union politics. For example, many union women refuse to engage in protest action organised by the main trade union confederation on the occasion of Labour Day because of their dislike of its leadership. Several union women in my interviews accuse the union movement of having the wrong priorities and being a puppet of the government. These women's grievances focus on allegations of corruption and collusion with government and business leaders on the part of union leaders as well as the lack of transparency and democracy among the large federations. According to union women and NGO activists, such allegations have created an atmosphere of distrust and have resulted in further fragmentation of the labour movement.

Indonesia

With the passage of new labour legislation since 2000, restrictions imposed as part of the repressive, New Order industrial relations system have been largely rescinded. Direct interference by military or police in dispute settlement at the behest of employers is now largely a thing of the past, despite continued intimidation of unionised workers by hired thugs, according to interviews with labour leaders and as reported by Ford (2001:18). But despite these improvements in freedom to organise and despite the general trend towards democratisation, the growth of NGO advocacy on labour issues, and increasing linkages between trade unions and civil society around the world, the picture remains bleak. Indonesian trade unions generally have not expanded notably in terms of membership due to union fragmentation, lack of experience in advocacy and lobbying, and the lack of interest from political parties. Aspinall argues that the nascent working-class identity of the mid-1990s has been "subsumed into a broader category of *rakyat*, 'the people'" (1999:22). He therefore envisions a protracted struggle to expand the benefits of democracy to workers, even though the opportunities for organisation among workers have greatly expanded.[8]

The immediate result of the passage of the Trade Union/Labour Union Act in 2000 was a sharp increase in the number of trade unions that sought registration with the Ministry of Manpower. By the end of 2000, almost 40 new federations had registered, and by early 2003 this had increased to 66 federations at the national level and more than 11,000 enterprise-level trade unions at local level (Quinn 2003). In addition to these official organisations, workers have also taken advantage of the new political freedoms to unite into foundations (Yayasan) or local groups or networks (Paguyuban), for which no official statistics are available since registration either does not specify the area of work or is not necessary. Many of these new unions, union federations, and workers' groups suffer from a lack of knowledge, skills, and financial stability which restricts their operations, makes them vulnerable to political interests, and creates fears of chaos and confusion among employers (though some employers might find such instability more useful for their own purposes than unity and effectiveness among trade unions).

As in Thailand, most female union leaders are concentrated in smaller federations, regional unions, and informal workers' groups. This may be the result not only of a glass ceiling that keeps women from reaching top union leadership positions but also women's reluctance to engage in union politics. Many union women in my interviews with them voiced complaints about their male leaders. Such complaints resulted from their perception that union leaders had personally sold out to business and state interests during labour protests and negotiations over labour legislation (see Chapter Five for more detail on women's union leadership).

That trade union federations and confederations have not been under pressure to improve their governance structures and systems is largely due to the stake that both government and business circles have in perpetuating the labour movement's weaknesses. In Indonesia, fragmentation of the movement is also a direct outcome of legislation allowing virtually any small group of workers to establish a union and participate in collective bargaining. The immediate results are a mushrooming of small trade unions and consequently a growing fear among employers that the process of collective bargaining becomes unmanageable due to the many competing groups of workers (Quinn 2003). Legislation also restricts the collection of dues from workers, which in turn affects the financial stability of unions and their ability to carry out activities.

Since the Indonesian government for decades allowed only one official trade union federation to operate and actively discouraged workers from forming alternative unions or federations, the widespread caution towards unionisation is not surprising. Even worse, many workers in urban as well as rural areas appear reluctant to put their trust in any organisation that claims to represent their interests. Observers of Indonesia note that the label 'communist' or 'leftist' has become an easy and often used weapon in the hands of leaders, from national government or village level, to prevent or subdue popular protest, especially labour protest (for example Saptari 1995). Thus, many union leaders and labour NGO activists are confronted with misconceptions about unionisation and its goals, with prejudice, and with doubts about the relationship of unions with the government and its agencies at the provincial, district, and village levels. This obstacle is especially serious among women workers who often have low levels of formal education and who have frequently been socialised not to question authority. It will most likely take several years of

large-scale awareness-raising efforts and deepening of democracy to remove such apprehension and misunderstandings, though continued fears of a return to more restrictive legislation and treatment may be realistic in some cases. The international mobility of employers that characterises much of current foreign investment into Indonesia and that shapes a significant portion of women's formal employment further worsens the above scenario. In sum, although the Indonesian state has reformed the industrial relations system since 1998, a conducive environment for the exercise of workers' rights is not yet present.

Comparison

The weaknesses distinguishing trade unions in both Thailand and Indonesia are similar and they result in significant practical and ideological obstacles to women workers' mobilisation and organisation. Not only do trade unions not represent a large number of workers (thus effectively excluding a large number of women workers from the movement), but their institutional structure and leadership patterns are at times heavily criticised by union women because of corruption and co-optation. It is therefore not surprising that many union women prefer to remain in leadership positions in small federations or area and regional trade unions, rather than contest national or other high-level positions. The absence of any domestic sources of pressure on trade union federations and confederations to improve their governance structures and systems is in large part due to the stake that both governments and business circles in the two countries have in perpetuating the labour movement's weaknesses. In both countries, fragmentation of the movement is a direct outcome of legislation allowing virtually any small group of workers to establish a union and participate in collective bargaining, as well as employer encouragement for the establishment of rival trade unions.

But an even more powerful political obstacle to collective organising in the workforce arises from recent history. Here, an interactive dynamic can be observed between changes in political alignment and mobilising structures. Both countries are still coming to terms with the legacy of communist or leftist movements which in 1965-66 (Indonesia) and in 1976 (Thailand) were violently suppressed by the armed forces. Because major trade unions in both cases had closely aligned themselves to the communist parties, they suffered heavy losses in the aftermath of the coup d'etats that wiped out the parties and their

supporters. Thus, the organisational weakness of the trade union movement and its poor image in the eyes of many women workers are also related to the blows inflicted on the legitimacy of trade unionism in the aftermath of major shifts in political alignment.

Faced with these obstacles, Vedi Hadiz (2002) concludes that labour has not been able to (re)build its political space in much of Southeast Asia. The defeat of the communist and other leftist political movements, together with the suppression of union movements that followed, have left trade unions unable to make use of new opportunities presented by political transformations, let alone successfully respond to and fight for labour rights in the context of economic restructuring. Hadiz argues that the international mobility of employers that is the hallmark of globalisation worsens the above scenario. Although Hadiz appears to overlook positive local-level developments (such as the rise of regional trade union groups that are more directly accountable to their members) and appears to expect a linear model of development, he is nonetheless correct in asserting that the labour movement in both Thailand and Indonesia generally has been unable to capitalise on positive trends as described in Chapter Three.

Conclusion

This chapter has compared trade unions in Thailand and Indonesia in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, and in relation to social movements. It has argued that the obstacles faced by trade unions with regard to membership and leadership are similar in both countries. Restrictive legislation, fragmentation of the labour movement, internal rivalries and charges of corruption keep membership relatively low in the private sector (despite a growth in the urban formal labour force), while at the same time discouraging women from contesting and reaching leadership positions.

Partially in response to these weaknesses, both countries saw during the 1990s the emergence of campaigns and networks on labour issues that incorporated new elements from civil society and that pressed for more broad-based social, political and economic change than was previously undertaken by trade unions. This change was particularly noticeable in Thailand, whereas in Indonesia labour's growing rapport with other social movements was perhaps born of necessity (because of labour repression) rather than

strategic insights into possibilities for future strengthening. As a result, in Thailand cross-cutting alliances have been maintained over the past ten years, whereas in Indonesia shifting NGO priorities and the introduction of freedom of association radically altered and frequently put an end to alliances between trade unions and NGOs after 1998. Thus, in both countries, political and economic changes forced trade unions to search for new alliances and frame their demands within the wider struggle for democracy and political rights, thereby increasing their appeal to groups other than workers.

To what extent such social movement unionism has the potential to mobilise women workers depends in part on whether union women can engage in alliances with women's movements and their organisations (see Chapters Six and Seven). This chapter has shown that women's movements in Thailand and Indonesia have in recent years increasingly recognised the diversity among their members, supporters, and audience. During the 1990s, both countries witnessed a rapid increase in the number of women's organisations engaged in social and political activism, as well as a widening of the issue areas. In both cases, this widening was partially due to international lobby activities and the growth of a global women's movement, but also the result of political developments necessitating and making possible activism on issues of urgent concern to grassroots women, in particular violence against women and women's role in politics.

Although a few women's organisations have taken up labour issues in a broad sense, the mainstream women's movement in Thailand has so far largely been silent on problems of women workers' exploitation and vulnerability in the workforce and at the workplace. Compared to the alliances with legal and health experts necessitated by its campaigns to date, the Thai women's movement appears to have engaged in few (if any) alliances with workers' organisations to address women workers' issues. The Indonesian women's movement has also yet to undertake large-scale action on women workers' issues, but several of its well-known member organisations are closely involved in advocacy on behalf of and involving women workers. Thus, the potential for building alliances with other movements and for creating new 'project identities' that could become the basis for new struggles is perhaps greater in Indonesia than in Thailand. How the presence in Thailand of an increasingly influential middle-class with its own political aspirations (for example, agitating in 1997 in support of the new Constitution and in 1992 for an end to military

involvement in governance) affects this equation requires further research and cannot be answered here.

In summary, Chapters Three and Four have compared the influence of recent economic and political developments on the potential collective mobilisation and organisation of women workers in Thailand and Indonesia. The diversity of factors under consideration and their inter-related nature make any clear-cut prediction extremely difficult. On the one hand, workers in Thailand have greater experience in collective organising and in lobbying government than workers in Indonesia. This might influence their willingness and ability to organise, although workers in Indonesia may have greater enthusiasm for trade unionism given the (still recent) introduction of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. This chapter has demonstrated that Thai trade unions continue to engage in broad-based alliances with other social movements, whereas in Indonesia such alliances diminished rapidly after 1998. Yet, the mainstream women's movement in Indonesia currently displays greater openness to activism on women workers' issues than it does in Thailand. These opposing influences necessitate an analysis and comparison of an additional factor that may shape the outcome of (and women workers' responses to) such political and economic forces: gender relations and gender regimes. These are the focus of the next chapter.

[1] Although the Thai state attempted to co-opt labour by granting some "basic industrial and other democratic rights and guarantees within a developing parliamentary system" (Brown 2004:90), the absence of enforcement of labour rights means that these developments cannot be subsumed under either the social-democratic or the populist models that Hadiz (1997) identifies as discussed by Brown (2004: 89-91).

[2] Other struggles taken up by the trade union movement during the early 1990s were the campaign for higher minimum wages, for extension of social security, for reinstatement of freedom of association for state enterprise workers, and for paid maternity leave (Brown 2004:325).

[3] A more recent example of the mainstream labour movement's effort at branching out beyond blue-collar workers' issues was evident during the May Day celebrations in Bangkok in 2004. At that occasion, Somsak Kosaisuk, chairman of the State Enterprises Labour Relations Confederation, demanded that the government "write off farmers' debts and lend money to farmers to increase productivity" (*Bangkok Post* 2 May 2004).

[4] Ford points out that while such community-based organisations for workers might at first glance be "no different from labour-oriented NGOs" because of their "lack of shop-floor access and their overwhelmingly middle class hierarchies", they exhibited significant differences in their self-characterisation and their institutional focus: "alternative unions focused their struggles on the high profile, fundamental issues of union recognition and workers' rights to organise and strike", thereby "attack[ing] the industrial relations system head-on" (Ford 2000:12).

[5] These organisations include both religious and secular feminist groups, such as Kalyanamitra, Kelompok Perempuan Sadar (Group of Aware Women), Gerakan Anti-Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan di Indonesia (Indonesian Anti-Violence against Women Movement), Rifka Annisa, Convention Watch Working Group, and Flower Aceh. While many women's organisations are regional or local in nature and rely on volunteers, others are active throughout the country and receive assistance from foreign NGOs and foundations.

[6] These include the National Commission on Violence Against Women, the Legal Aid Association – Association of Indonesian Women, and Women's Journal Foundation.

[7] One of the reasons for the low proportion of women elected in 2004 is that, of the 13 per cent female candidates, political parties placed only one-third sufficiently high on the list of party candidates to have a chance to be elected (*Jakarta Post* 8 May 2004).

[8] Although Indonesia has seen the establishment of several self-declared labour parties, they received only minimal voter support during the 1999 and 2004 elections. While Indonesian voters are generally not very familiar with small, new parties, it is worth noting that corruption allegations, trade union rivalries, and religious or ethnic allegiances have dissuaded workers from voting for these labour parties, rather than (only) the lack of class consciousness suggested by Aspinall (1999). Ford adds to this that the parties lacked a base among workers and "were largely vehicles for personal ambition or elite machinations" (2000:16). On the other hand, established political parties generally do not regard labour as a constituency worthy of attention, due to its relatively small size, its heterogeneity, and the perceived low self-identification as labourers. As Aspinall argues, "labour weakness is often an integral element in the early phases of democratic regimes, precisely because middle and dominant classes accede to democratisation only when they are confident that their essential interests (property rights, for instance) will be safeguarded" (1999:23).

Chapter 5 - Comparing gender relations and gender regimes in Thailand and Indonesia

Introduction

The previous two chapters compared economic and political factors influencing women workers' ability to mobilise and organise collectively. Those chapters found that while the Thai industrial relations system may have given workers greater opportunities to gain experience in trade unions, the recent changes in labour regulation in Indonesia have stimulated unionisation and union activity in that country. In Thailand, several workers' organisations have a history of collaboration with other social movements on social and economic issues, whereas in Indonesia such alliances are still relatively scarce. Such differences between the two countries may have both positive and negative consequences for women workers' ability to organise collectively. This chapter argues that the consequences for workers of economic and political differences will at least in part depend on gender relations in general, and gender regimes in trade unions in particular.

The chapter has three aims: to analyse and compare gender relations and regimes in the two countries; to present a short historical background to women's activism in the trade union movement in Indonesia and Thailand; and to present the available data on the position and roles of women in trade unions. The chapter concludes by summarising the factors that obstruct women's membership and leadership in trade unions in Thailand and Indonesia.

Unequal gender relations constitute an important source of obstacles to (and impetus for) women workers' mobilisation into and recognition by the labour or women's movements in both countries. Such unequal relations are often reflected in the organisational structure and activities of trade unions, while through their practices and operations trade unions at the same time reproduce and sometimes intensify gender inequality. This chapter will argue that gender inequality in trade unions is a direct consequence of cultural beliefs (often supported by religious teachings) that see women's principal social roles in the domestic sphere and that legitimise unequal power relations and gender interests. At the same time,

male union leaders feel threatened by challenges to what Connell has called the "patriarchal dividend": "the advantage to men as a group from maintaining an unequal gender order" (2002:142). However, while these factors to a varying extent hinder women's mobilisation and organisation, they can also become grounds for mobilisation and self-organisation. Therefore, the next chapters will discuss women's reactions to gender bias and gender inequality and their counter-hegemonic use of such practices and discourses for further mobilisation and organisation of women workers.

A short discussion of other factors that could shape women workers' efforts to mobilise and organise is warranted to explain why age, religion, and locality are not foregrounded in this chapter. Women workers are differentiated in various ways by age, with older Indonesian women said to be frequently working in small, rural, and informal workplaces, while young women predominate in large, urban manufacturing operations due to their relatively higher levels of education. However, a similar distinction may not be justified in Thailand, where export-oriented manufacturing started earlier than in Indonesia. On average, the union women interviewed for this research were older in Thailand than in Indonesia. Their greater level of experience in trade unionism may be the result of extensive opportunities for trade unionism in Thailand and participation in democracy-related protests during the 1970s that radicalised a large number of workers.

But the possible impact of age on mobilising must be considered in conjunction with gender and political economy. In Indonesia, younger women may find it easier to mobilise collectively when they are not yet married and do not have heavy household responsibilities. Yet, in Thailand, many older union women never married, equally allowing them time for union activities. Still, many of these women are at risk of redundancy due to their low skill levels (or at least skill categorisation), their relatively low education, and the fact that they predominantly work in 'sun-set industries' such as the textile and garment sector. Thus, age has an inconclusive impact on women workers' efforts at mobilising.

Likewise, it is difficult to tell how organised religion might shape women workers' mobilising. Buddhist institutions in Thailand do not offer women much opportunity to experience organising as women, instead relegating women largely to support positions and

allowing them to gain merit primarily indirectly (through their sons or through monetary contributions) rather than through direct action such as ordination (prohibited, except as nuns with lower status). Yet, Mills (1999) provides examples of how unions subverted religious symbols and practices to encourage solidarity among young workers. Jeffrey reminds us that while "much blame has been laid at the door of Buddhism ... for the second-class status of Thai women ... [s]uch an explanation confuses, for instance, ideological, or contextual, Buddhism with actual lived experience ... which is historically and regionally diverse" (2002:xviii). She concludes that "Buddhism's explanatory power has been greatly overextended and applied to cultural determinist readings of Thailand" (2002:xxiv). The same objection could be made to assumptions about how Buddhism influences women workers' activism.

In Indonesia, Islam has adapted in many different ways to local traditions, but women have generally had an active role in religious affairs and religious life, from Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) to women's religious study groups to the wives of religious leaders. The Indonesian women's movement counts among the earliest forms of women's activism the fight by women's religious organisations (e.g. Fatayat, Nasyiatul Aisyiyah, and Muslimat) for girls' right to education, women's rights in marriage, and the nationalist cause (Blackburn 2004). Yet, Mather (1988) found in West Java that the involvement of local male religious leaders in the recruitment and management of young women in factory work reinforced notions of obedience and women's subordination, thereby stifling opportunities for labour protest. Robinson emphasises that the relationship between gender differences and Islam "is by no means clear or uniform" and shows great disparity between official discourse and practice (2001:30).

In my interviews in Indonesia and Thailand, I found no direct evidence of the importance for women workers' mobilising of such precedents, or of religion in general. In Indonesia, this may be due to the New Order's attempts during the 1970s and 1980s to stymie attempts to use religion as a trigger for protest of a political nature. However, it could equally be because women workers might find religion divisive (in Indonesia where there are sizeable minorities of Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists, the state ideology of Pancasila calls for unity in diversity), unremarkable (in Thailand a large majority of the population is Buddhist), or not as meaningful as being a woman, a worker or any other identities.

There is strong evidence that migrant workers in urban industrial centres rely on networks based on place of origin or ethnicity to find jobs and navigate their way around their new surroundings (Mills 1998; Smyth and Grijns 1997). Employers in Indonesia are known to employ local people as managers or supervisors in order to suppress labour unrest among a mostly migrant workforce (Mather 1988). Yet, my interviews with union women found no evidence that these women have become active or mobilise other women based on networks of locality and ethnicity. As mentioned above in relation to religion, among the possible reasons are avoidance of fragmentation among union members, a strong state ideology of unity in diversity, and a reluctance to base one's activism around a religious identity. In short, since women workers did not remark on their age, religion, and ethnicity or area of origin, and since the impact of these factors is not clear-cut, I will not discuss them in detail in this chapter.

Gender relations and identities

The gender-related obstacles experienced by women workers within their trade unions have their origin in the structures of trade unions and women's position in the labour force, and in their overall position and role in society. Unequal gender relations can have a strong impact on women's (and men's) identities, through cultural expectations of women and girls, limitations to women's leadership, and the gender division of labour. How important are these factors in relation to women workers' efforts to mobilise and organise collectively in each of the two countries under examination here?

Thailand

Recent English-language writing on Thai women and their gendered identities tends to be limited in number due to the disproportionate attention of researchers and observers towards Thai women's role in the prostitution industry. According to Cook and Jackson, "the issue of Thai modes of subjectivity, in general, and sexual and gender identity in particular, are poorly developed" (1999:13-15). Significantly, some of the literature has tended to treat gender as a binary system through which men and women are locked into specific and measurable roles and responsibilities. For example, women's relatively

important role in the formal economy, together with low fertility, high literacy, and matrilocal marriage traditions led Yoddumnern-Attig et al. (1992) and Bhassorn Limanonda (2000) to proclaim Thai society to be characterised by relatively egalitarian relations between men and women and high levels of women's independence. Women's role in the household and their control over household resources and reproduction are said to offset the male dominance of the public sphere of macro-economics and village or national politics (Yoddumnern-Attig et al. 1992:17). Yoddumnern-Attig et al. even go so far as to state that as a result of declining fertility and women's increasing foray into paid employment "rather than complimentary roles, wives and husbands are ... assuming roles based on *mutual cooperation and support* characterized by the joining sharing of family and economic responsibilities", many of which used to be sex-specific (1992:18, emphasis in original). Limanonda stresses that "Buddhist teachings include principles of 'hierarchical order', but the relative status of the individuals involved is normally defined by age rather than sex" (2000:249).

In practice, women's status and possible gender identities are in flux and depend strongly on the specific geographical and historical context, not to mention on the question which particular groups of women are being discussed. For example, men continue to be the automatic heads of household (unless absent) and are widely regarded as the main breadwinners for their family even though women from diverse economic and educational backgrounds contribute substantially (at times earning equal incomes). At the same time, women continue to bear the main responsibility for child rearing and child care, though the presence of domestic helpers can mediate the impact of such tasks on access to work and public life in general. While gender roles of Thai men and women in traditional agricultural society were characterised by complementarity with different spheres of responsibility and work (Van Esterik 1999), the rapid transformation of (parts of) the Thai economy and society since the 1960s has radically changed many traditional tasks and responsibilities assigned to men and women, as well as the meanings attached to them.

Mills observes that "most Thai village ethnographies depict a variety of factors such as relative age, wealth, education, and occupational position as markers of social identity and status that are at least as significant as differential gender roles and expectations" (1998:18). Van Esterik also reminds us to start from the assumption "not of uniformity but

of diversity – of multiple contested gender statuses and ideologies rather than of a single hegemonic system" in Thailand (1999:276):

> The rigidity that appears on the surface of Thai gender interactions is permeated by asexual power differentials that form the basis of gender hierarchies as of other hierarchies. What is fixed is the importance of power in all relationships, not sexual orientation ... Hierarchy is more important than gender in this and other situations. That is, gender signifies in combination with power (Van Esterik 1999:280).

Gender works in conjunction with other markers of difference to differentiate among women as much as between women and men. Thus, in Thailand gender differences may in some situations be less meaningful and important than other relations of power.

State visions of gender relations have also changed over the years. Although Thai women have throughout the centuries variously contributed to national development, their formal incorporation into the modern project of development started with the Fourth Five Year National Economic and Social Development Plan (1973-76). This plan described the need to promote women's greater welfare, particularly in health, education, and family planning. In subsequent national plans, the move from seeing women as 'receptors' of development to enabling them to become contributors and later agents of development is visible. The Fifth Plan (1982-1986) stressed the expansion of social services for women, whereas the Sixth Plan (1987-1992) aimed at integrating women into economic development through the promotion of their participation in local groups such as rotating savings and credit groups and income-generating groups (Yoddumnern-Attig et al. 1992). More recent plans have specified the need for greater gender equality and gender mainstreaming, in line with international discourse on gender and development such as emerged around the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

As an example of gender and age differentiation in hierarchical Thai society, a major difference can be observed in parents' expectations towards their children. Whereas daughters are socialised by parents, peers, and teachers to accept parental authority, assume responsibilities, guard their moral reputation, and avoid imposing on others (*kraeng jai*), sons are clearly more at liberty to indulge in play, sports, and adventure (*pai tiaw*) involving male friends in locations outside the immediate surroundings (Mills 1998; Yoddumnern-Attig et al. 1992). As such, adolescent and young adult men learn to take

risks and to explore new communities, which puts them at an advantage in settling into a new workplace and confronting authority. Young women, on the other hand, from an early age face greater social control and limited physical mobility, resulting in obstacles to be overcome in assuming public roles such as in trade unions once they enter formal workplaces.

Incorporated into women's dominant gender identity, feelings of indebtedness and obligations to parents or relatives are widespread and play an important role in women workers' behavioural choices (Theobald 2002). Mills describes how Thai workers are simultaneously limited by the prevailing cultural perception of workers as "dependants of employers":

> Both the Thai state and employers commonly invoke a moral discourse of patron-clientage to define labor relations. They emphasize Thai cultural ideals of *bun khun*, asymmetrical exchanges between beneficent superiors and their dependants who should respond with loyalty, gratitude and respect (1999:176).

Although most women workers in rural settings are strongly bound to dominant gender regimes about women's and men's appropriate roles and behaviour, Ungpakorn (1999) documented a very different situation in his small-scale research on urban women workers. He found that the majority of mostly well-educated and skilled women workers at a Bangkok multinational underwear factory (where 2,300 out of 2,800 workers were unionised) had relatively liberal attitudes towards gender norms. These women largely sanctioned sex outside of formal marriage (though a majority were themselves married), did not criticise fellow women for not being married, and enjoyed the financial independence that factory work afforded them (1999:71-5). These findings show that strict gender norms in relation to sexuality and women's domestic role have weakened among some women in urban Thailand, and that the demand for women in the labour market contributes to changes in gender regimes. Yet, however far these women may be removed from the stereotypical image of the uneducated and passive young migrant worker facing exploitation in Bangkok's factories, they are likely to form a minority, given that the overwhelming majority of Thai women workers cannot count on high skill-levels and educational attainment to protect them from intimidation and job insecurity.

Another example of the diversity of women's experiences of gender regimes can be found in education. Among Thai women aged over 15 years, 9.5 per cent are illiterate, compared to 5.1 per cent among men (UNDP 2004). Lack of knowledge of legal rights, in particular about labour laws, is a widespread theme in the literature on women workers in Southeast Asia (Singarimbun and Sairin 1995; Martens and Mitter 1994). The cause of this lack of knowledge is located at least in part in the education system which prioritises learning about the obligations that form part of citizenship, rather than rights and benefits as guaranteed by law (Mills 1999). Although improved funding and infrastructure have gradually expanded access to education during the past fifty years and Thailand boasts high levels of literacy for all age groups of women and men, substantial numbers of girls and boys continue to drop out of school. Some 7 per cent of Thai children enter the labour force before the age of fifteen, many of whom migrate to urban areas in search of low-skilled employment (NSO 2003b).

Based on her research in Bangkok and in a northeastern rural community, Mills (1999) considers the migration experience to constitute an obstacle to union organising, since many young migrants are ignorant of their legal rights and have little information about locally available support services (see also Brown and Frenkel 1993:90). In the context of Thailand's reliance until recently on low valued-added manufacturing exports, there has been an almost constant flow of new migrant labour to urban centres in the form of young women with generally low levels of formal education. The availability of such a cheap reserve labour force dampens the potential of industrial workers to engage in collective action for better wages and working conditions. It also provides employers with little incentive to discontinue their reliance on repressive models of labour control.

Notwithstanding recent changes in state policies, it would be safe to conclude that gender inequalities as well as inequalities between women are perpetuated through gender regimes in organisations and institutions (Mills 1998; Ungpakorn 1999). Such regimes reproduce stereotypes about particular gender identities, frequently manifested in lower risk-taking behaviour among young women, intense self-scrutiny and censorship especially related to sexuality, and feelings of gratitude or obligation towards parents. These types of behaviour and expectations generally impact negatively on women workers' ability to organise, though they also may motivate some to mobilise collectively. In general, educational

institutions and family life transmit and reproduce gender regimes characterised by unequal relations, which are only partially counterbalanced by young women's incorporation into the modern, urban labour force.

Indonesia

Given the diversity of cultures and traditions in Indonesia, it is difficult, if not impossible, to point to one specific gender regime as shaping the responses of women workers to social and economic injustice. Robinson provides a brief overview of the different interpretations of women's status, observing that "ideological systems are complex and not always seamless" (2000:145). She concludes:

> The homogenising imperative of the New Order definitions of appropriate gender roles mask profound differences in the patterns of gender relations and in gender ideologies found throughout the archipelago. They also mask the manner in which gender intersects with other bases of power ... [and] with other principles of social differentiation (2000:146).

While some practices and discourses in kinship system, household arrangements, marriage or family law, and education point to relative equality between women and men, it is equally possible to name others in decision-making, economic life, or political representation that show relative gender inequality. Research in Javanese Muslim village settings has shown that the social and religious norms governing gender roles and responsibilities focus largely on the husband as official head of the household, leader in the community and neighbourhood, main income-earner, and protector of women (LSPPA 1999). In contrast, women are generally expected to get married in their early twenties, and while allowed to work outside the home, have been trained since their youth to become housewives whose main role is to organise the household (including household finances), to take care of children, and to serve their husbands.

The New Order encouraged both men and women to consider these responsibilities as part of women's *kodrat* (god-given role) in the same way that men's leadership abilities are considered innate due to their greater penchant for rationality (in contrast with women's emotional nature).[1] Based on her research in Tangerang in the late 1970s, Mather observed that through marriage, men supervise women's sexuality, while women digressing from

these norms are branded as immoral and are ostracised (1988:150). In the same vein, an NGO activist in Semarang complains that women are seen as having no soul (*nyawa*), instead following their husband's soul: upon marriage, women are called by their husband's name, and women's actions reflect on their husband's good name.[2] Similar to Thailand, in Indonesia youth are generally socialised to respect and obey their elders, a cultural aspect of which employers make active use in their attempts to subdue labour unrest.

Changes in perceptions of women's role and position in society can be read in references to women in the government's Broad Outlines of State Policy (Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara).[3] Traditional gender expectations as outlined above were encouraged by the New Order regime which in its early years considered women as useful conduits for achieving improvements in child health and family welfare, and as contributors to national economic development. The emphasis in the New Order's Pancasila ideology on harmonious relations extended to the family and household sphere: gender was interpreted to relate to non-conflictual relations between the male breadwinner of the family and his wife whose priority was taking care of the household and children. As Robinson observes, "a gendered model of political authority with its origins in an imagined tradition of a patriarchal family is a cornerstone of the repressive ideology that has underpinned the New Order" (2000:141). New 'Indonesian' norms introduced by the national government in 1993 aimed to achieve a better balance between responsibilities and rights for both husband and wife. Yet, this new ideal of 'equal partnership' (*kemitrasejajaran*) is only slowly starting to alter attitudes towards gender roles and responsibilities and its influence is likely to be strongest among young people (LSPPA 1999: 80).[4]

Furthermore, although the Pancasila system started to collapse after 1998, its legacy is evident in dominant discourses about women in Indonesia. For example, the 1974 law on marriage still sanctions the traditional division of labour and responsibilities, by proscribing that women's responsibility for raising children and taking care of the household, and men's role as the main income-earners and protector of the family. The government-sponsored Family Welfare Movement (PKK) during the 1960s and 1970s referred to women as *pendamping suami* or spouse consort. In this organisation as well as in the civil servants' wives' organisation Dharma Wanita "women's relations in the private domain determine their status in the public domain" (Robinson 2000:142). The PKK's official

ideology listed as the Five Tasks of Women (Panca Dharma PKK) as husbands' escorts/attendants, as managers of the household, as procreators and educators, as supplementary wage earners, and as members of society (Bianpoen 2000b:159).

Contradictions are rife between this ideology and the reality experienced by many women. Dominant societal norms allow married women to earn an income, but only as long as they can adequately take care of the non-financial needs of their children and husband (LSPPA 1999:81). In contrast, most single women from financially needy households are expected to work, either in factories or as domestic helpers in their own country or overseas as so-called 'TKI' (Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Indonesian workers) or 'TKW' (Tenaga Kerja Wanita or women workers). Single women from urban middle-class families will also frequently work for several years before getting married. While local culture and tradition strongly vary throughout Indonesia and in their impact on women's work, almost all areas and ethnic groups are to some extent gradually influenced by national legislation and policy, and display elements of patriarchal gender regimes, whether based on (or justified by) *adat* (local traditions) and/or organised religion (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Confucianism).[5]

Tradition, religion, and law frequently coalesce to produce and reproduce gender inequalities (Mather 1988). Making use of such traditional sources of women's subordination including deference to and acceptance of structures of control, local employers have little difficulty in subduing protest by women workers and preventing unionization during the New Order. Young women workers therefore show little inclination to organise collectively. Similarly, with regard to status and power, Errington argues that "women in many [of Indonesia's] societies are assumed to be more calculating, instrumental, and direct than men, and their very control of practical matters and money, their economic 'power' may be the opposite of the kind of 'power' or spiritual potency that brings the greatest prestige; it may assure them of lower rather than higher power and to designate it as the most important factor in high prestige is to create an optical illusion based on the importation of Eurocentric ideas about the relations of power and prestige" (1990:7). Although its practical benefits for women are undeniable, women's growing participation in the industrial labour force during the past two decades should perhaps in some cases be seen similarly as a source of negative status rather than power.

However, as a result of the economic crisis of the late 1990s and processes of social and policy reform and decentralisation, local hierarchies have shifted and society's negative views of women who work outside the home have diminished. According to Rita Olivia from the Jakarta-based Trade Union Rights Centre, most people understand that men's income is no longer enough to sustain the family.[6] Dian and Ria from Unggaran, an industrial area in Central Java, affirm this view: when asked about local attitudes to women's activism, they recount that "the community around us does not support us, but they do not oppress us either. They just look at us strangely, simply because we are a women's group and we often stay up until early in the morning, talking about the issues".[7]

It is likely that significant numbers of Indonesian women are unaware of or do not understand their rights in the workplace. While levels of functional literacy among youth have been high in urban areas since improvements in the 1980s to access to education, many women have grown up in rural areas where such improvements are lagging and where economic and human resources are scarce. According to 1999 data, illiteracy still affects 5.3 per cent of rural women and 2.7 per cent of urban women between the ages of 10 and 44 (BPS 2002), whereas UNDP data from 2002 show that 16.6 per cent of women but only 7.5 per cent of men older than 15 years are illiterate (UNDP 2004).[8] Yet, even though many women in their late teens and early twenties have finished elementary school and lower high school, most were taught only about their responsibilities as citizens, and not about their rights. As Smyth and Grijns write, "[women] workers employed in large, urban firms ... are young and inexperienced migrants, already socialized into docility and as a consequence not inclined to join labor organizations" (1997:17). Most of the young workforce, therefore, depends for their awareness of human and labour rights, on NGOs and trade unions that are generally limited by budget shortages and difficult access to factory workers.[9]

How important each of these barriers is in explaining the level of organising among women workers is hard to say. Their relative importance depends partially on the strength of local cultural perceptions, but also on the particular economic history of an industrial area or company. Some women workers blame the various forms of labour control in their workplaces. In Unggaran, for example, "if no trade union exists yet in a particular factory

in their industrial area, it is not because of a lack of interest on the part of workers, but because of management obstacles."[10] Others instead fault women's lack of self-confidence and skills, while yet others point out that women would happily get involved in trade unions if only they had a chance to reach decision-making positions and to contribute their talents. Lastly, the adaptations and modifications of dominant gender roles and responsibilities as they are made within each family will heavily impact on women's responses to the obstacles and opportunities they face with regard to joining a trade union in their workplace.

Comparison

This analysis of gender relations and gender regimes in Thailand and Indonesia shows that both countries are witnessing gradual changes to dominant gender regimes as a result of globalisation, urbanisation and/or urban migration and young women's large-scale entry into the formal labour market. In Indonesia in particular, although state ideology that defined women mostly as mothers and wives is still strong, in reality ideals of motherhood and a strict division of labour in the household have always been (or are increasingly) untenable for large proportions of women, especially those in lower-income households. While there is room for some generalisations – such as the gender norms disseminated through educational and religious institutions and through family values – the above analysis clearly points to the existence of multiple gender identities and to resistance to dominant gender regimes. Gender inequality remains a strong feature of society in both countries but is experienced in conjunction with other markers of difference. Recognition of differences between women implies the need to consider gender regimes in conjunction with class, religion, place of origin, ethnicity, age, and other markers of difference.

Yet, although gender always operates together with such other differences, Van Esterik observes that it may not be the most meaningful difference. Thus, in Thailand power differentials based on gender may not provide adequate explanations for women's ability or likelihood to mobilise and organise collectively. There is much less evidence to suggest that this is equally the case in Indonesia, where the authoritarian state for many years propagated a hegemonic ideology that emphasised gender differences, in particular separate spheres and different responsibilities for women and men. How important this difference

between Thai and Indonesian gender relations and gender regimes might be for women workers in their efforts to mobilise and organise collectively will be considered in the next two chapters.

Women in trade unions: history and current status

The previous section demonstrated that gender inequalities generally remain strong in Thailand and Indonesia but may be reproduced and articulated in different forms and spaces. Chapter Four already showed that women's movements are increasingly active in both countries, especially on political and social issues, and that Thailand has experienced an increase in women in elected political positions while there has been an increase in women activists in politics in Indonesia. Do we witness a similar influx of women into trade union leadership positions? What do we know about the numbers and roles of women in trade unions in Thailand and Indonesia? Contrary to popular perceptions, women workers have long been active alongside men in trade unions in much of Southeast Asia. Yet, what little data is available shows that the number of women leaders or committee members remains low, as does union density among women (the percentage of employed people who are unionised).

Thailand

Publications about Thailand's economy and the labour movement have routinely ignored the role and needs of women workers as agents and as a constituency in its own right (for example, Lawler and Chokechai 2000; Deyo 1997; Pasuk and Baker 1995). In Thailand, women first took up trade unionism in the early 1930s when women dyers were the only group of (predominantly male) protesting workers to win their dispute (Thorbek 1987:65). By 1950, some 150 unions were active (Lawler and Chokechai 2000:223), with women mostly participating and taking action in public sector workplaces and unions but also conducting protests in the textile, cement, and petrochemical industries. In 1951, women workers even organised a separate union whose existence was, however, short-lived. Notwithstanding intermittent military rule, women continued their active role in trade union activities throughout the 1950s and 1960s, though very few reached leadership positions in their unions. During the pro-democracy protests between 1973 and 1976, many women

trade unionists were visible in the street protests that were violently subdued by the armed forces (Ungpakorn 1999).

The main response by trade unions to the increasing (and increasingly visible) presence of women in their midst was to call for protective legislation. As was common in many capitalist societies until well into the second half of the twentieth century, politicians and male labour activists alike (as well as some women) expected such legislation to protect women's ability to fulfill traditional roles as mothers and wives, by limiting women's work at night, underground, and in what they considered to be dangerous places. It was arguably only when women started to enter the formal workforce and unions in greater numbers during the growth of the light manufacturing sector (1970s-1980s) that unions gained greater awareness of women's role, rights, and potential needs as women beyond the sphere of protection.[11]

Even though women's economic activity rates have historically been high in Thailand compared to other countries in the region (76 per cent for women compared to 87 per cent for men in 1990[12]) and women entered the factories in and around Bangkok in large numbers starting in the 1970s, union density among Thai women and men has been and remains very low. Estimates of national union density for private sector workers vary from 1 per cent (estimate by ILO) to 5 per cent (estimate by union leaders). Figures from the Ministry of Labour for 2001 showed that 285,000 out of 11 million employees in private sector enterprises – or 2.6 per cent – were union members, compared to 61 per cent of state enterprise employees (Voravidh et al. n.d.: 8).[13]

In general, labour observers widely agree that reliable figures concerning unionisation are difficult to come by since many unions and federations inflate membership numbers for political reasons or to attract overseas funding. Since few unions or federations disaggregate membership data by sex, existing estimates for women are often even less reliable. According to a 1993 assessment based on unknown sources, men account for 60 per cent of trade union members in Thailand (among 839 labour unions). However, my interviews indicate that women frequently are well represented among union membership in more 'feminised' sectors such as garment and textile, pharmaceuticals, and gem cutting. The most reliable figures come from the Arom Pongpangan Foundation, a Bangkok-based

labour NGO which in 1999 conducted a survey about committee membership in trade unions and found women to be a minority at all levels of union leadership (see Table 5.1 below).

Table 5.1: Sex-disaggregation of committee members of labour organisations in Thailand (1999)

Type of trade union	*Proportion of committee members (per cent)*	
	Female	Male
Labour union council (national)	28.31	71.69
Labour union federation	18.34	81.66
State enterprise labour union	13.95	86.05
Industrial or area-based union group	31.77	68.23

Source: Voravidh et al. (n.d.:26).

Women leaders are found in Thailand at the level of area groups and factory-based (enterprise) trade unions, but rarely in national bodies such as federations or congresses. During the past five years, no more than two women have held seats on the Labour Confederation Center of Thailand, one of two powerful confederations that conduct most of the high-level negotiations with government and employers' organisations. More promisingly, many area trade unions in and around Bangkok have female coordinators who have risen through the ranks and have learned leadership skills through years of practice. In short, although there is some reason for cautious optimism in sectors dominated by a female workforce, women workers continue to be under-represented in union leadership as a whole.

Indonesia

Although Dutch socialist activists first introduced trade unionism to the then colony of the Dutch East Indies in the 1920s, references to Indonesian women's activism in trade unions first emerge in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The inequalities suffered by women workers in formal employment during both the colonial period of resource extraction and the post-independence period of slow economic recovery and later import-substitution were significant: "Gender both influenced the wage differentials between male and female for the same work and defined occupations, or tasks within an occupation, as women's work for which less remuneration could be offered" (Elliott 1997:138). Women in informal

employment, such as home-based work and cottage industries, were (and still are) not covered by national labour legislation. Although the number of women workers in formal waged employment in the period after independence was low relative to both men and the overall population, women nonetheless were a sufficiently significant presence in industrial workplaces and on plantations to warrant the establishment of a women's section of the Barisan Buruh Indonesia (BBI) shortly after its founding in 1945. The women's section one year later was made into an autonomous section of the BBI, tasked to "act as an educational and 'go-between' body" for women workers to formulate and convey complaints and requests to the trade union (Elliott 1997:134). Whether in order to win women's support or to distinguish itself from its colonial predecessor, "the democratic government of the new Republic easily granted all sorts of legal rights to women" including the right to equal pay in the civil service (Blackburn 2001:2).

Yet, women had little influence in the drafting of early labour legislation after the country attained independence, which reflected the class and gender biases of policy-makers. The new legislation introduced between 1947 and 1951 limited women's opportunities through "negative proscriptive" and protective clauses regarding work that might endanger women's health or morality, though numerous exception clauses allowed for women to become a large reserve labour force (Elliott 1997:140-143). Women's representation in union leadership structures in the estate, cigarette, and textile sectors was significantly lower than the proportion of female members in these unions (10 to 30 per cent compared to female membership of 45 to 65 per cent in the late 1950s; Hindley 1966:208-9 quoted in Elliott 1997:149). It is therefore not surprising that Elliott concludes there was "a failure on the part of the national leadership of organised labour and women's groups to push for the recognition of women as workers in their own right, in need of, and deserving, promotional help for economic independence" (1997:147). Where unions and women's organisations raised issues such as child care and housing, she argues that it was (at least initially) with the intention of reaffirming women's roles as wives and mothers (though such practical measures were no doubt useful and fulfilled urgent needs for many women workers) (Elliott 1997:147). When the more progressive communist party and its affiliated trade union and women's group GERWANI were crushed after the aborted coup of 1965, industrial relations and women's role in it quickly shifted to emphasising – at least in

theory - women's ideal domestic role as housewife and caretaker of children (Wieringa 2002).

The situation in Indonesia in terms of membership and union density levels is similar to that in Thailand. According to a membership (self-)verification exercise undertaken in 2002, the three largest federations and confederations claimed a membership of almost 8 million out of a total formal sector labour force of 27.3 million (CBS labour force data for 2001; Quinn 2003). Quinn asserts that "it seems extremely unlikely that this figure is an accurate reflection of the level of trade union membership, particularly as many unions lost a significant number of members" since 1998 (2003:26).[14] If we look specifically for data on women's unionisation, Indonesian federations report that women represent up to half the membership in female dominated sectors such as textile and garment, pharmaceuticals and health, and tourism (see Table 5.2 below). Even if true, such statements conceal the fact that union density among Indonesian women workers in general is not much higher than the level in Thailand, given the high proportion of workplaces without trade unions. Of the 40.2 million working women (2001 World Bank data for 1999), Table 5.2 shows that the major national trade union federations counted only 676,733 women as members. While this latter statistic does not include the significant number of women in factory-based, small trade unions that are not linked to any federation, this does not make up for the fact that millions more women work in small and/or home-based workplaces where unions are rarely active.

Table 5.2: Women as a percentage of trade union membership in Indonesia (2002)

Union federation	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Women as % of total*
SBSI	--	--	1,700,000	--
FNPBI	26,308	23,692	50,000	47.4
TSK	194,743	400,264	595,007	67.3
KAHUTINDO	205,916	185,205	391,121	47.4
SPMI	55,169	38,512	93,681	41.1
FARKES	7,650	9,350	17,000	55.0
KEP	136,075	19,710	154,785	12.7

Figures based on union reporting. Note: SBSI and FNPBI: multi-sectoral federations. TSK: garment and textile workers' federation (now renamed SPN); KAHUTINDO: forestry and wood workers' federation; SPMI: metal, electrical and electronics workers' federation; FARKES: health and pharmaceutical workers' federation; KEP: chemical workers' federation.

Source: ACILS 2002 internal report.

In Indonesia, only 2 out of the 7 major federations listed in Table 5.2 (FNPBI and KAHUTINDO) are headed by women. It is these two women who are present at negotiations with the government and employers and who represent Indonesian women workers at meetings with the ILO. The trade union representatives on the tripartite team that negotiated (and agreed to) the controversial new Manpower Bill during late 2002 and early 2003 consisted of 5 men and only 1 woman (as head of the women and children committee of the SPSI-Reformasi federation this woman, Ari Sunaryati, holds a much lower position than the male committee members who are all chairpersons of large federations).

Nevertheless, some positive trends can be noted. Among the more than sixty trade union federations registered with the Indonesian government (Quinn 2003), at least a handful of smaller federations are headed by women, especially those that work with textile and garment workers (Serikat Buruh Indonesia-Perjuangan and Gerakan Serikat Buruh Indonesia are two examples, with membership ranging from a few hundred to 6000 workers). Women also head several non-affiliated regional federations, such as the Independent Trade Union of Medan and the Surabaya-based Regional Trade Union. Although most of these women leaders have worked hard to reach and hold on to their current positions, lone women on important committees such as the Indonesian women noted above are widely regarded by both men and women as token representatives who have very little influence during discussions and are often forced to agree with the male majority, even on important issues concerning women's rights. Nevertheless, as Chapters Six and Seven will show, many of these women leaders are not averse to raising women's or gender issues in union circles.

Comparison

In both countries, women's involvement in union activities increased significantly during the 1970s and 1980s when export-oriented industries deemed women to be particularly suited for their labour-intensive production lines because of their image as hard-working, dexterous, and obedient, and because of their construction as cheap labour (see discussion in Chapter One, p.31). Although the literature written by aid agencies or international organisations often emphasises the lack of knowledge about labour rights among these

thousands of newly recruited women in industrial employment (the "women workers as victim" trope according to Ford 2003; see also Ong 1991), the role played by a minority of women who are union activists should not be overlooked. As happened in South Korea (Koo 2001), many young Indonesian and Thai female factory workers appear to have slowly gained an appreciation of the Marxist and socialist discourse that was in vogue with many NGO workers and some trade union officials. When the prohibition of independent labour unions in Thailand and Indonesia forced many genuine workers' activists to conduct their discussions in secret, women remained active as both union organisers and members.[15] Thus, women workers were not always obedient and passive workers, as expected by their managers at the time. Yet, their numbers in leadership and membership in trade unions remain relatively low in many sectors. Even in those sectors dominated by a female workforce, union leadership is often in male hands.

Compared to Indonesian women, the rich history and longer experience among Thai women in engaging in strikes and other forms of protest in the female-dominated light manufacturing sector are important factors in explaining the current differences in women's labour mobilisation and activism in the two countries. Strike action, by both men and women, became more common in Indonesia during the early 1990s (Kammen 1997), some twenty years after Thai women workers started such protest against employers and managers (Ungpakorn 1999). On the other hand, Chapter Seven will show that age characteristics may actually work to the advantage of Indonesian women workers' organisations that count more young women without family obligations as members compared to their Thai counterparts. In other words, while experience and a common history of resistance play important roles in generating collective action among women workers in Thailand, the presence of young women activists willing and able to engage in strike action (because of the novelty of it or because of the linkages with the fight for democracy) can make up for the lack of experience and common history among Indonesian women workers.

Based on the above statistics, it can be argued that, although it is still relatively small, women's membership in labour organisations has taken on an increased significance for the labour movement in recent years, due to sharp declines in absolute membership levels in sectors such as woodwork and furniture, transport, and garment and textiles manufacturing

that were once regarded as traditional union strongholds. Since the economic crisis of the late 1990s which hastened the demise of the textile and garment sector where thousands of women and men have been unionised in both Indonesia and Thailand (ILO 1998), union organising efforts by both men and women in these countries have slowly begun to focus on women workers in home-based and outsourcing arrangements and in white-collar jobs. Many of the larger unions and federations have established or are establishing women's committees. These developments show that there is a gradual shift of attention towards both potential female members and potential new sectors to be organised. In conclusion, although absolute numbers of women and union density among women remain low in both countries and although women's leadership remains the exception rather than the norm, union women themselves may be becoming increasingly aware of the importance of their union membership and participation both to themselves and to their organisations.

Trade unions as gendered organisations

Although the unfavourable political environment and unions' frequently undemocratic organisational structure undeniably pose obstacles to unionisation and mobilisation in general, women are differently affected by them than men because trade unions are also gendered organisations (Franzway 2002). As such, trade unions transmit as well as reproduce ideas about gender relations for their members and for society in general. My interviews with women union activists and NGO staff suggest that, similar to advanced economies and other developing economies (Razavi, 1999:669; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994; Ledwith and Colgan 2002; Franzway 2002), many trade unions in Indonesia and Thailand display a lack of sensitivity and receptiveness towards women and the particular concerns that many women bring to their unions. This gender bias reflects the organisational culture of trade unions, and is part and parcel of the gender division of labour. However, its negative impact on women's mobilisation works in tandem with the factors outlined in earlier chapters: workers' weak economic and social position as a result of the global division of labour and the political circumstances that prevent trade unions from becoming genuine and effective mobilising vehicles for large numbers of workers. As this section will show, women's reluctance to become active in unions is thus linked to both general obstacles to effective trade unionism as well as gender bias. Since little has been written specifically on women's experiences of trade unions as gendered institutions

in Southeast Asia and since this section relies in large part on findings from interviews with union women in Thailand and Indonesia, it will not be comparative in nature. Instead, it will describe the obstacles experienced by union women as members and as leaders in Thailand and Indonesia.

Membership

Gender bias in trade unions is intrinsically connected to economic inequalities among workers at local, national, and global levels, with the combined effect of a double disadvantage for women in the most vulnerable positions in the labour force (Franzway 2002). These women are neither protected by trade unions (or legislation) nor recognised as workers worthy of protection. This is especially the case for workers in the informal economy, whom trade unions may regard as competition or a threat to hard-won rights (Razavi 1999). Such refusal to defend the rights of informal workers implies a refusal to acknowledge the gendered nature of the workforce, and results in the exclusion of large numbers of women from the mainstream union movement. While trade unions such as the Self-Employed Women's Association in India have shown that women in the informal economy can be and want to be organised in unions, my interviews found that many (though not all) male leaders of mainstream Indonesian and Thai trade unions continue to view these women as little more than housewives voluntarily engaging in extra income-earning activities.

In some of the economic sectors where trade unions have gained a foothold, women constitute only a small percentage of the labour force. In such male-dominated sectors as transport and maritime enterprises, women may find it extremely difficult to challenge gender bias in trade unions. For example, when I asked her about the biggest obstacle to women's union membership and leadership in her sector, Ester from the Indonesian seafarers union recounted difficulties in finding sufficient numbers of women who want to organise collectively, because women are still denied employment opportunities in her sector. This is mainly due to traditional beliefs that women's rightful place is in the household or in workplaces considered feminine, rather than on board large ships or working at ports.[16] As a result, women will not likely gain a substantial percentage of membership in the seafarers union, whereas United Nations agencies and women's NGOs

argue that women need to form a critical mass of at least 30 per cent to be able to make their voices heard (Karam 1998). Whether there are differences between union women in Thailand and Indonesia in this respect requires further research.

In both countries, trade unions persistently show themselves to be gendered organisations that reproduce gender inequalities. Similar to findings in Australia (Franzway 2002:42-44), household tasks and lifecycle factors such as childbirth and child rearing frequently weigh heavily on women in industrial work and make it difficult for them to engage in union activities (Oxfam 2004a). Not only do economic pressures force the majority of women workers in the industrial sector to spend most of their evenings and holidays doing overtime, learning new skills, or selling goods in order to supplement their income, but household tasks mean that they have very little time to engage in union activities. Tao (from the Bangkok plastics factory) puts it this way: "We tried to have more women active in negotiations with employers, but in the first year, the women said, 'let the men do it' [because] they don't have time because of their family obligations. So now all the committee members are men!"[17]

Women workers themselves may regard their work as a temporary pursuit until they marry, which perhaps gives them less incentive to struggle for better working conditions. Such complaints were heard more often among Indonesian union women than among those in Thailand, perhaps as a result of the generally younger age of the former. For example, when I asked them about their future plans, about half the dozen women involved in the women's committee of an East Jakarta electronics manufacturing company agreed with the assumption that a woman will give up her job if her husband is capable of earning sufficient income for the family, or will at most work merely to help her husband earn money.[18] The persistence of such perceptions is probably the result of widespread diffusion of basic religious teachings, Javanese and other cultural ideals, as well as state ideology. All of these prescribe that a husband's responsibility is to provide a livelihood and protection for his family whereas a wife is supposed to take care of her household and raise the couple's children.

At times, men and women continue to blame women themselves for not taking advantage of the opportunities offered to them by their unions and in particular by male leaders. In

doing so, they unwittingly reproduce and reinforce gender bias. Union women in both countries frequently made such statements in my interviews with them. For example, when I asked them to explain the low proportion of women attending union activities, Suganta from the Rangsit area union north of Bangkok and Sulistri, head of the women and children department of SBSI in Jakarta, complained that many of the women in textile factories are not willing to become active in the union because they are lazy and do not see the purpose of the union. However, rather than providing explanations, such complaints may mask these women's difficulties in reorienting trade union activities to make them friendlier and more accessible to women. Both Suganta and Sulistri appear to recognise the persistent economic inequalities and the organisational inflexibility that create barriers to women's participation. Sulistri points out possible strategies to overcome the external obstacles to women's advancement, such as holding meetings at convenient times and places, appeasing reluctant husbands by informing them about their wives activities in the union, and forming small discussion groups of around five people to discuss women's issues in an open atmosphere.

Lastly, the bad image of trade unions also keeps many women from becoming union members. In both countries, trade unions are equated in the media and by politicians with trouble, violence, and anarchy.[19] Tao (from the plastic wares factory in Bangkok) recounts that the community around her factory and her residence has a largely negative impression of trade unions: they try to "stay away from troublemakers." She continues by saying that "women union members are distrusted ... [people] get their image from the media, from television, they only see the mobs and the road closures."[20] Similarly, Ester from the shipping union in Indonesia believes that:

> many people see demonstrations as the main image of the trade unions but demonstrations are also seen as something [only] for factory workers (*buruh pabrik*) ...Women have seen me on television in a demonstration, being hit by the police, so they get scared and also some are forbidden to join by their husbands.[21]

A related problem in Indonesia is the image of women factory workers as loose or immoral women in the eyes of the surrounding community (Tjandraningsih 2000:266). It is therefore not surprising that many women have difficulty obtaining permission from their parents or husbands to join the union or are heavily criticised by them for their union activism.

According to my interviews, many of those who live away from their parents and immediate family purposely conceal their union activism or are careful about how much and which information to share during their visits home.

Leadership

Even where women dominate an industrial sector, it is still men who lead the national trade union federations in such sectors in Thailand and Indonesia. Instead, in both countries significant numbers of women are active in regional trade unions, in area groups of trade unions, and in smaller enterprise and industrial unions. Trade union activists at the factory or area level are frequently critical of the manipulation of the labour movement by national-level leaders, and these two levels must therefore be clearly distinguished (Ungpakorn 1999). Thus, it is possible that the absence of women in national union leadership positions reflects not only women's numerical under-representation in unions but also their greater interest in staying close to workers and their rejection of self-interested politics at the national level. When I asked for their opinion on politics and politicians, many women union leaders indicated that they preferred to distance themselves from mainstream politics and politicians because of the negative connotations these held among women workers in their areas or workplaces. This is similar to Budianta's finding about women activists in Indonesia deliberately refusing to enter party politics as an attempt to redefine politics (2002:40). If this is indeed true, then it can be said that union structure and culture at once exclude women from the top jobs and provide them with incentives to organise at different levels and using different methods, as well as to pursue linkages with other women who face similar disenchantment with the labour movement.

In my interviews with them, several women union activists blame the persistence of male leadership on men's exploitation of unequal gender relations to discourage or outright forbid women from contesting leadership positions. There are extensive similarities here to Franzway's discussion of 'male clubs' and the culture of masculinity in Australian trade unions (2002:45-47; Pocock 1997b)). My interviews revealed suspicions on the part of union women that many men feel threatened by women's entry into unions and by their growing knowledge and skills. These perceived threats encourage men to try to prevent challenges to the leadership positions they have held for many years, or what Connell

(2002) has referred to as the "patriarchal dividend." According to Pocock, "for many [Australian union] men their masculinity is constituted by their position of union leadership" (1997b:21). In Indonesia, this may happen through the deliberate misinterpretation of religious teachings about women's leadership.

As a clear sign of such gender-based rivalries, union women complained in interviews about the lack of recognition they receive and their lack of access to independent and reliable information. For example, Vera and Haryati who are on the central decision-making body of the Indonesian Metal Workers Federation, recount the frequency with which invitations addressed to them – in their capacity as committee members – somehow never reach them. Their federation chairman has even prohibited them from participating in some internal union activities, according to Vera and Haryati in an apparent sign of fearfulness of the challenge they represent to him.[22] Pornthip from the state-owned Telecommunications of Thailand office in Bangkok explains that men believe they should be in front as leaders and women should follow, because labour is men's work and men have the strong personality needed for leadership.[23] When I asked her about the attitude of men in unions towards women, Umi from Yogjakarta relates that men are not yet ready to accept women's participation in politics or society, not so much because of fear of competition but because of the fact that they do not want women in their midst.[24] Although union women in my interviews in both countries commonly reported the persistence of such a culture of masculinity and the denigration of femininity, many women union leaders actively challenge these facets of trade unionism and sought to reshape gender relations in trade unions by contesting leadership positions and resisting the need to become like their male union colleagues. Yet, even women union leaders cannot put women's or gender issues on the union agenda without strong support from women members.

Similar to ordinary members, women leaders in both countries face resistance from their parents and husbands. Because of cultural and gender characteristics in Thailand and Indonesia, this obstacle is much more serious than experienced by union women in Australia (Franzway 2002:43). For example, it is considered inappropriate for women to go out on their own late at night to public places. Suganta from Bangkok spoke to me of the dirty process of internal union elections where false accusations towards women candidates are rife – only because they are women who are threatening the status quo.[25] Because in

Thailand such accusations often contain allusions to women's deviant sexuality and sexual behaviour, women are even more reluctant to engage in leadership contests in their trade union (see Jeffrey 2002:134 for a similar observation regarding Thai women in politics).

Pearson and Theobald have commented on the difficulties encountered by young women in Northern Thailand in their efforts to organise, due to "the conflation made between women's work in the factories, their 'out of place' situation as young women living without male/family protection, and the connections made between their single working status and sexual activity, promiscuity and disease" (1998:989-990). Thus, a common theme in my interviews in Thailand was the degree to which contesting leadership positions requires union women to subject themselves to intense scrutiny about their personal lives. It is not immediately clear why such scrutiny did not feature in my interviews with union women in Indonesia. The position of some of them as heads of women's and children's departments may have offered some measure of legitimacy and protection, though others may have considered allusions and allegations about their sexual behaviour so commonplace or trivial that they were not worth remarking upon.

Because of cultural expectations that women become mothers and because of union women's class positions (in other words, frequently unable to afford paid domestic help), men often use women's childbearing and child rearing responsibilities as an excuse to keep them out of union leadership. According to Amin from the Indonesian women workers NGO Yasanti, unions select male shop stewards because the male leadership considers women too preoccupied with domestic duties.[26] Tao (from the Bangkok plastic wares factory) describes how union women who have left their children in the care of a family member (often in their rural area of origin), find their inability to care for the child blamed on their union participation. Many of their female factory friends and relatives apparently believe that these women should spend their free time instead with their child.[27] Strangely, such criticism does not appear to apply to middle-class working women who leave their children in the care of domestic helpers, revealing a class bias that heightens gender inequalities.

Being responsible for children also brings with it practical obstacles, according to my interviews with women leaders. Wilaiwan, an area union leader working near Bangkok,

believes that "if women leaders do not have their own family, are still single and have no children, they tend to be better problem-solvers ... because they can educate themselves, they have time to get training or improve their own ability". She concludes that such women without attachment "tend to be a better leader than men".[28] In effect then, women union activists and leaders who do not live up to these ideals are doubly faulted: for not being good union activists and for falling short of societal ideals of motherhood and domestic happiness. Sofiati, the president of the wood workers federation in Indonesia, reflects this realisation when she complains that "women are clearly easily faulted for what they do, and are belittled [by men] ... if women are not twice as good and working twice as hard as men, they will not be given a chance to compete for leadership positions, due to the patriarchal culture around them".[29]

But women themselves also uphold gender stereotypes that they have internalised, as Pik, a former textile worker now working with a Bangkok labour NGO, recounts:

> I think our weakness is that we still believe in [traditional] gender roles. We as workers still believe that our leader must be a man. We still have the old impression about the aggressive style of struggle led by male leaders. It takes a lot of understanding to see that women can be good leaders too.[30]

Whether and how women leaders might be different from their male colleagues will be analysed in Chapters Six and Seven. But the reproduction of gender stereotypes and gender inequalities by women themselves extends to personal and family issues. For example, Sulistri in Jakarta is reluctant to ask her husband to share in family responsibilities that are traditionally seen as women's domain, although in practice she and other leaders with children have no choice but to rely somewhat on their husbands, extended family, or (if they can afford them) domestic helpers for household support.[31] Thus, many women activists and leaders find it difficult to implement in their own lives the changes they promote with respect to their union's women members. Suganta from Bangkok concludes:

> In my opinion, if you want to be a woman leader you first of all have to have high self-confidence and be decisive about what you want to do, but in the same way you have to be careful about your image [in terms of sexuality]. For my divorce, Thai society cannot see that I dumped my husband but [they say that] he dumped me ... because I am aggressive. I do not care about what people think. I am trying to prove that a woman can work on her own, without a man ... [but] men cannot accept women as their leader.[32]

The above examples reflect the ways in which union women – both as members and as leaders – experience and contest the male-dominated nature of the union movement which reflects the local and global gender division of labour and dominant gender regimes. Whereas the women quoted here believe that they have a legitimate reason to engage in collective action, their male union colleagues largely dispute this on the basis of their understanding of appropriate womanhood and the gender privileges (and power) that this entails for them.

Conclusion

In both Indonesia and Thailand, women experience serious obstacles in their efforts to become active in trade unions, though independent (regional or area) unions offer a more conducive environment than official (nation-wide or sector-affiliated) unions and federations. Gender regimes within trade unions and in society in general keep many women from developing an interest in trade unions, based on popular beliefs that trade unions do not represent women workers' interests and that women's rightful place is primarily in the private as opposed to the public sphere. As the data presented in this chapter show, even when women do become union members, they have little chance of breaking through the glass ceiling operating in the mostly male-dominated and male-oriented trade unions due to both gender stereotypes about leadership and the precarious economic situation of most working women. In this regard, the situation is similar to that of trade unions in developed countries in the 1990s before diversity and equality became keywords in these unions' attempts to transform from monolithically class-based to more flexible and broad-based social movements. But although trade unions in Thailand and Indonesia are perhaps trying to transform themselves to face the threats of globalisation and economic restructuring, they have so far shown little inclination to increase the number of women among their membership and in their leadership ranks.

The only exceptions to this picture of patriarchal trade union culture are regional and area-based trade unions in both countries which are generally small in membership, relatively democratic in nature, predominantly female in membership, and of recent origin (after 1998 in Indonesia and after 1992 in Thailand). Several of these organisations have strong ties with NGOs and operate without formal registration, which perhaps also explains their

relatively greater openness to female leadership. It is in these organisations, and in the women's committees of the large national federations, that most women leaders are located.

Although solidarity among women workers cannot be assumed to arise from a common position or common experiences in the production process, the structural obstacles they encounter and the patriarchal culture in which they operate imply potential bases for solidarity. The union women quoted above indicate that gender roles and expectations of women are slowly changing in their societies. Yet, these union women are active in support and advocacy groups that have been established by and for women workers, demonstrating that they do feel some affinity with other women or commonalities in their struggles. With increasing numbers of women leaders in the trade union movement, the visibility of women workers' struggle – and of the obstacles they encounter – is gradually growing stronger. As a result, union women have embarked on a variety of initiatives to overcome these obstacles and to increase women's participation and representation in trade unions. These initiatives are analysed in Chapters Six and Seven.

This chapter has argued that unequal gender relations are continually reproduced through hegemonic gender regimes and that these continue to be serious obstacles to organising among women workers. Yet, women workers also challenge such gender regimes through their practices and through counter-hegemonic discourses. Can we predict the strength and success of such challenges based on analysis of gender regimes and gender relations in the two countries? While this chapter has found many similarities between the two countries in terms of the obstacles facing women in unions, it is worthwhile re-emphasising some of the differences in gender relations and gender regimes in relation to labour.

Whereas Thai women have traditionally been active in a variety of economic sectors, in Indonesia the legacy of state ideology defining women as mothers and wives is still relatively strong. In Thailand, women's large-scale entry into the urban formal labour market occurred earlier than in Indonesia and has weakened strict gender norms with respect to sexuality and marriage more extensively than has been observed in urban Indonesia. Yet, recent political changes have led to a sharp increase in the number and in the scope of activities of women's organisations in Indonesia, and the percentage of women in formal political positions is higher in Indonesia than in Thailand, thus potentially

offering sources of support for women workers' activism. In terms of gender regimes, then, one might expect to see more public activism by women (workers) in Thailand, whereas the political environment on the other hand might seem more conducive to women's activism in Indonesia. Yet, what may strongly influence women workers is the strength of hegemonic gender identity (common motherhood) in Indonesia in contrast to the absence of one such hegemonic identity in Thailand, as a result of the interaction between gender and other forms of hierarchy. In conclusion, it is difficult to predict on the basis of an analysis and comparison of gender regimes and gender relations the extent and success of women workers' collective mobilising and organising. The next two chapters will explore the cultural meanings, uses, and potential politicisation of the diverse identities that women bring to the process of unionisation and to the organisational settings of their activism.

[1] For a comprehensive discussion concerning gendered power and in particular contestations over financial power among Javanese, see Brenner (1995).
[2] Personal interview Hendro Agung Wibowo, Semarang, 29 January 2004.
[3] See Sulistyaningsih (2003) and Robinson (2000) for an overview of the Broad Outlines of State Policy.
[4] As an example of women workers challenging the New Order concept of *kodrat*, some women in my interviews with them mentioned resourceful arguments to avoid being limited to doing the reproductive and caring work. Ati (not her real name), a trade union activist in East Jakarta and a single mother of one child, says that her husband who lives in Saudi Arabia does not mind her union activism, as long as she takes good care of their child. Thus, she claims, while her nature (*kodrat*) as a woman is to take care of her husband and child, as soon as those tasks are finished she is free to do as she pleases beyond her 'natural' duties as wife and mother, including spending time on union activities.
[5] I do not intend here to generalise about the legal and cultural status of women in various parts of Indonesia, the differences among which have been described by for example Robinson (2001, 2000). The impact of Islamic, *adat*, and national legislation is also by no means one and the same throughout the archipelago. Yet, it can be said that in most cases, there are signs that women are considered unequal to men or at least require different treatment from men based on their less prestigious roles.
[6] Personal interview Rita Olivia, Jakarta, 18 November 2003.
[7] Personal interview Dian and Ria (not real names), Unggaran, 31 January 2004.
[8] Other sources estimate the percentage of functional illiteracy among Indonesian women of all ages to be as high as 25 per cent (LSPPA 1999). This information must be seen in light of the low rate of completion of elementary education in Indonesia: 54 per cent of urban women aged ten and over have completed six years of elementary school or less (compared with 44 per cent of men), while fully 83 per cent of rural women have not gone on to middle school or have not completed elementary school (compared with 75 per cent of men) (BPS 2000). In Thailand, education levels are generally higher among both men and women due to greater investment in the education system and attempts to increase access to education during the past four decades.
[9] On a similar note, since functional illiteracy is common among older women workers in many countries in Southeast Asia and older women are frequently at a disadvantage in the labour market due to discrimination and prejudices, organising is especially unusual among this group (CAW 1995, Asian Exchange 1995).
[10] Personal interview Dian and Ria (not real names), Unggaran, 31 January 2004.
[11] In Thailand, this process was partially the result of the shift from import-substitution industrialisation to export-oriented industrialisation during the late 1950s which continued throughout the 1960s. This shift eventually alerted employers and government to the general need to see trade unions as a partner in their attempts to increase value-added production and improve the quality of products for export (Brown and Frenkel 19993). In the context of increasingly mobile investment chasing cheap labour, however, the extent to which Thai industrialists and their overseas investor counterparts have put this approach into practice by can be debated.
[12] Women's high labour force participation in Thailand should not necessarily be interpreted as a sign of their empowerment. As Theobald argues, "the idea that women are more conscientious at work, in order to support their families, relate[s] to the specific ways in which gender relations are constructed through socio-cultural and religious processes ... Buddhist philosophy entails a sexual division of labour, whereby men participate more in merit-making, religious and political activities, leaving women to predominate in the economic and entrepreneurial aspects of life" (2002:137). Theobald quotes W. Klausner (1997:137) as saying: "Poor rural girls simply do not have the same opportunities and options as their male counterparts. Unable to enter monkhood as *bikkhuni*, they cannot avail themselves of this avenue to fulfill the merit obligation to their parents ... Village girls realize that they cannot use the coin of merit to repay their meritous debt but must use the currency of cash".
[13] Based on figures from the Department of Welfare and Labour Protection and the Ministry of Interior, Lawler and Chokechai estimate that excluding groups that cannot legally be unionised such as employers, homeworkers, and civil servants, but including state-enterprise workers, the union density rate in the mid-1990s was more than six per cent (2000:218). However, as noted in Chapter Three, although union density is especially high among workers in state enterprises, the 2000 State Enterprise Labour Relations Act does not allow them to strike and imposes additional restrictions that differentiate public from private-sector union members.
[14] While the formal economy counts around 27.3 million workers according to CBS estimates, the informal economy absorbs the remainder of those who are employed, estimated at some 52 million workers. The three largest confederations and federations referred to here are the KSPSI (Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh

Indonesia (formerly the (F)SPSI), considered to be the main grouping defending the status quo during the New Order regime), the KSPI (Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Indonesia, founded in 2003, with twelve sectoral/industry unions that broke away from FSPSI in 1998), and the SBSI (founded in the early 1990s, outlawed by the New Order, now freely operating). Quinn points out that several of the claims made about union density in Indonesia have no clear statistical basis (2003:26).

[15] During these underground meetings, women workers alongside their male colleagues criticised so-called 'yellow unions' (those affiliated with employers and managers or the government), discussed alternative forms of self-organisation and occasionally planned strike action and other kinds of protests against employers and the state (Hadiz 1997; personal interviews).

[16] Personal interview Ester Tuange, Jakarta, 10 October 2003.

[17] Personal interview Tao (not real name), Bangkok, 25 January 2002.

[18] Group interview with several women workers at an electronics manufacturing company, Jakarta (Bekasi), 16 March 2003.

[19] During interviews in both countries, many women workers complained about the lack of understanding among the general public about the need for labour struggle. Public actions such as protest marches, factory occupations, or street demonstrations were usually condemned by passers-by (for example, other community members and presumably middle-class people inconvenienced by traffic jams caused by the protests), to the disappointment of the workers. Bangkok Post Assistant Editor Sanitsuda Ekachai confirms that "trade unionists suffer from stereotypes and get little public sympathy from the middle class" (phone interview, Bangkok, 15 January 2002).

[20] Personal interview Tao (not real name), Bangkok, 25 January 2002.

[21] Personal interview Ester Tuange, Jakarta, 10 October 2003.

[22] Personal interview Vera and Haryati, Puncak, 29 September 2003.

[23] Personal interview Pornthip (not real name), Bangkok, 22 January 2002.

[24] Personal interview Umi Akhiroh, Yogjakarta, 4 August 2003.

[25] Personal interview Suganta, Rangsit, 13 May 2002.

[26] Personal interview Amin Muftiyanah, Yogjakarta, 1 August 2003.

[27] Personal interview Tao (not real name), Bangkok, 25 January 2002.

[28] Personal interview Wilaiwan Saetia, Bangkok (Omnoi-Omyai), 14 January 2002.

[29] Personal interview Sofiati Mukadi, Jakarta (Ciganjur), 11 March 2003.

[30] Personal interview Pik, Bangkok, 11 January 2002.

[31] Personal interview Sulistri, Jakarta, 27 August 2003.

[32] Personal interview Suganta, Rangsit, 26 October 2001.

Chapter 6 - Collective mobilisation of women workers in Thailand

Introduction

As described in Chapter Two, the 1990s saw a gradual merging of behavioural and structural perspectives in social movement theories, just at a time when some observers argued that traditional interest-based social movements were being replaced by those built on identities whose study appeared to require an all-together new approach. Tarrow's model of contentious action (1998) recognised the importance of social networks as a basis for collective action and of the existing political opportunity structure as a trigger for mobilisation. Other social movement analysts added factors such as transnational advocacy networks' use of language and values that cross borders (Keck and Sikkink 1998); emotions and contestations around their meaning (Taylor 1995, 2000); and the importance of taking a life-cycle approach (Roth 2000) while reaffirming the importance of framing of issues and demands.

Simultaneously, analysts of so-called new social movements have called attention to the processes whereby such movements create and give meaning to collective identities, whether they be legitimising identity, resistance identity, or project identity (Castells 1997:7-8). The main aim of new social movement theories has been to divert attention away from static conceptions of interest as the basis for movement towards the construction of collective identity that organises meaning for social actors. Based on these theories, Chapter Two argued that attempts to explain mobilisation and self-organisation by women workers in developing countries would be best served by examining their investments in collective identity. This would require an analysis of the (re-)construction of collective identity, the meanings and social goals it takes on, possible contestations of this identity by other groups, as well as its projection (through framing and emotions) to adversaries. Because women workers unite in the face of gender differences between women and men, as well as differences between women, Chapter Two suggested that the identities they act upon vary according to political, economic, historical, and cultural context.

Chapters Three to Five compared elements of these contexts in relation to Thailand and Indonesia and found that differences not only in labour regulation but also in gender regimes in these respective societies possibly shaped the ability of women workers to mobilise and organise collectively. This chapter describes how Thai women workers have contested and used particular local and global identities related to gender and work. Although women workers experience multiple subject positions and therefore do not all experience the same processes of mobilisation, this chapter demonstrates how mobilisation of women workers is strongly shaped by a society's dominant gender regimes and the justification for women's political and organisational representation that these regimes provide. Where women workers build solidarity and construct a common purpose with the aim of collective action, they build on the identities available to them in their societies but contest these and perhaps give them a different meaning. Whether the category 'women' or 'women workers' is regarded as a political interest group worthy of representation will strongly influence the process and outcomes of mobilisation. This influence of identity shows us the extent to which women's collective mobilisation is embedded in local and global but ever-changing gender regimes.

This chapter presents findings from research conducted in and around Bangkok. The first section gives a short background on the women workers' organisations encountered in Bangkok. This is followed by an examination of women workers' mobilising, structured around the four factors Tarrow describes as being essential for social movements. The first concerns mounting collective challenges: the political opportunity structure and repertoires of contention. Because the issues raised by women workers are a central aspect of their collective movement, they require a separate section for discussion. The next section discusses how Thai women union leaders and activists attempt to construct a common purpose through creating boundaries based on dominant gender regimes. Tarrow's property of building solidarity subsequently leads to issue framing. Lastly, the chapter reviews how Thai women workers sustain their movement through coalitions with other movements, in which the question whether to affiliate with national federations or to engage in separate organising becomes central.

For each of these properties, this chapter questions whether women workers consider gender or class identity as 'seriality' or whether they act upon it by mobilising and organising collectively. It finds that union women mobilise women workers on the basis of a workers' identity more often than a gender identity. However, as gender difference is situational (Connell 2002:13), many union women opt for tactical expressions of gender identity and at times utilise its multiple meanings for mobilising depending on context, aim, and interlocutor. The heterogeneity of Thai women workers means that not all of them regard gender as 'seriality' and that many of them consider gender and class interests to be intertwined. Thus, the sometimes contradictory and changing ways in which these women workers mobilise and organise collectively demonstrate the centrality of gender and economic regimes in the construction and contestation of women workers' collective identity.

Women workers' organisations

As Chapters Four and Five demonstrated, Thai women workers have been organising collectively in trade unions and in informal associations for decades, especially in the light manufacturing sector. They have been members of state-owned enterprise unions, industrial factory-based unions, area groups, home-based workers' groups, and self-help groups in both rural and urban areas. But their marginalised position in society and the labour market, together with unions' inability or unwillingness to defend women workers' rights mean that many more cannot or do not want to join trade unions. Ostensibly to address these obstacles and to struggle for women workers' rights, some Thai and Indonesian women workers' activists during the 1980s and 1990s began to establish workers' organisations that assist either existing women mid-level leaders or women who would like to learn about trade unionism.

Among the informal or formal organisations in Thailand that have sprung up to unite formal-sector women workers and to represent their interests, two organisations stand out because of their membership numbers and/or the continuity and nature of their activities. They also offer a good opportunity to contrast an activist group oriented towards women leaders with a grassroots-focused group that aims to unionise women workers. The Women Workers Unity Group (WWUG) and the Women Workers Liberation Group (WWLG)

were established in 1992 and 1993 respectively in Bangkok and its surrounding industrial areas where women workers predominate in light manufacturing industries.

According to its pamphlets and newsletters, the WWUG is an advocacy and pressure group whose purpose is to increase awareness of women's issues among female trade union members at all levels. This increased awareness aims to make women workers understand and solve their own problems, and to increase women leaders' ability to play a key role in the labour movement and to stimulate policy reform. Meeting approximately once every two months, its membership consists of women leaders and committee members of some nine major federations and sectoral unions who attend in their personal capacity rather than as representatives of organised labour. Most are from private enterprises in the industrial manufacturing sector, although several representatives from state-owned enterprises and semi-professional sectors such as education and health also frequently attend. The group officially comprises about fifty members, but if counting those who are mobilised but do not pay dues this number rises to several hundred.[1]

The WWLG was established in 1993 by the Center for Labour Information, Services, and Training (CLIST), a Bangkok-based NGO. In contrast to the WWUG, it prefers to implement activities directly targeted at women workers at the factory level with support from its full-time staff at CLIST. Its founder, Somyod, states that organising women workers and educating them about class and gender issues are the group's central objectives: "[We aim to] promote gender equality, to mainstream gender in the labour movement, and to help protect women's rights, campaigning against sexual violations and harassment in the workplace."[2] After several years of operation, the group ceased to be active during the mid-1990s before rebounding, thanks to renewed interest among former members and a new coordinator at CLIST. At the time of my research, the group claimed about 40 paying members who are not affiliated to any trade union or federation and an additional estimated 200 who cannot afford to pay dues or prefer association only, rather than membership.[3] Internationally, it collaborates with established women's NGOs such as the Committee of Asian Women and the UK-based Women Working Worldwide, but in its domestic activities, it is an autonomous group. The existence of these two groups is testimony to the emergence of Thai women as union leaders and activists and to their activism both as part of trade unions and in independent organisations. Both women

workers' groups were founded with the specific purpose in mind of increasing the organisational strength of women union leaders and improving their strategic vision.

Mounting collective challenges

What can we learn about the collective identities of women workers in these two groups if we focus on the collective challenges they formulate? This section discusses the processes through which women workers have built their own social movement organisations and continue to attract attention from members and opponents alike. It considers how changes in political opportunities relate to the types of action in which women workers engage. It is useful to consider the repertoires of action that women workers undertake in conjunction with political and economic circumstances. However, while political opportunity structure alerts us to the multiple factors that influence the groups' choice of strategies, partners and actions, it does not explain mobilisation and organisation despite adverse conditions since the late 1990s.

Political opportunities

Although women workers had been active in trade unions for several decades, the start of their movement dates from the early 1990s when opportunities for organising collectively emerged in the wake of democratisation processes in Thailand. When the military coup of 1991 not only banned unions in the public sector but also curtailed trade unions' rights in the private sector, workers' activism gained a new focus after years of in-fighting and increasing fragmentation (see Chapter Three, p.86). The return to democracy in 1992 provided workers with another boost when political parties started to woo previously neglected groups of voters, including workers, during their election campaigns. It was in this setting that the WWUG and the WWLG first emerged on the political scene, although many of its individual members had already been active for many years. The WWUG's first collective act (arguably the actual trigger for establishment of the group in 1992) was to demand ninety days maternity leave for women working in both the public and private sectors. Their campaign clearly benefited from the return to democracy, as it deliberately capitalised on efforts by political parties to please voters. When asked to describe factors

that helped the group in its campaign, Arunee, the group's first president, captured the moment in the following words:

> [The campaign] was very successful because we had the same interests [as the public], especially during that period after the May 1992 [political] crisis. All the politicians wanted to buy ... votes, so that's why they were very alert and cooperative with any issue that rose up.[4]

In addition to the changing political landscape, the emergence of the maternity leave campaign also coincided with the favourable economic climate of the early 1990s, when women workers seemed to have little difficulty finding jobs in the booming manufacturing sector and therefore did not fear dismissal as much as they have done since the mid-1990s. The maternity leave campaign was thus launched at a politically and economically opportune moment which was critical to the emergence and success of the WWUG: after several years of campaigning maternity leave was included in the labour law in 1993.

In contrast, the WWLG did not emerge through a single campaign issue, but was formed by women union activists who believed the time to be ripe for women workers to collectively pursue their goals. When asked in interviews to describe the origins of their group, activists mentioned that informal education classes had, over the course of several years, created a network of committed young workers. These men and women spread information about labour rights and strategies for protest to other workers in their geographic areas. This gradual approach to collective action did not involve a formal organisation until the early 1990s when sufficient local leadership became available to sustain the transformation of an informal network into a formal organisation. Intensive involvement by local women workers during significant periods of time meant that this group was not dependent on dramatic changes in the political or economic environment for its transformation from individual to collective activism.

But if we applied the political opportunity structure model to the development of these two women workers' groups during recent years, an interesting contradiction emerges. The economic crisis of the late 1990s presented the Thai labour movement with one of its greatest challenges: to sustain membership and activism in the face of unprecedented levels of unemployment and dismissals. Three years later, the Thai government under Thaksin Shinawatra was transformed from a centralised benefactor into a business-oriented

government catering to the interests of a "domestic capital class" (Brown 2004: xii) combined with populist measures to support the poor. As mentioned in Chapter Three, NGO activists and social observers have noted the subsequent narrowing of space for civil society, through shifting of government support to conservative organisations and a rise in public discourse labelling NGOs as unnecessary and unaccountable intruders. While these developments could have provided disincentives for women workers' activism, the experiences of both women workers' groups suggest the opposite. The WWUG was able to continue its activities despite heavy job losses in manufacturing since 1997. Although its membership has fluctuated during the past ten years, it did not decrease dramatically during or after the economic crisis. The WWLG did not suffer significantly from the economic crisis either (though it has remained very small), and expects workers to be radicalised – rather than disenchanted – as a result of the economic crisis. This is primarily attributed to strong criticism by NGOs such as CLIST concerning the government's handling of the crisis and its aftermath, in particular the questionable strategies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).[5] But it also bears witness to the resistance that negative aspects of globalisation and restructuring can engender among ordinary people, even when such resistance puts their jobs and their personal safety at risk.

In conclusion, changes in political opportunities constitute only one of many factors in the puzzle of how or why women workers will mobilise collectively despite seemingly adverse circumstances. For the WWUG, despite pessimism about possibilities for mobilisation in the context of the neo-liberal and anti-trade union Thaksin government and the aftermath of the crisis, membership has not decreased significantly, while the WWLG sees these developments as stimuli for workers to become active in the labour movement.

Repertoires of contention

What forms of activism do women workers engage in to mount collective challenges? The two organisations discussed here demonstrate the importance of donor relations and ideology in determining what "repertoires of contention" (Tarrow 1998) are used. However, it also draws attention to the economic realities of Thai workers and the organisational structures of these groups (to be discussed later in this chapter).

In both a technical and a financial sense, the WWUG is loosely affiliated with the German Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), which is in turn an offshoot of the German Social Democratic Party. FES focuses on political issues of relevance to workers in developing countries, but does not advocate a radical type of unionism where strikes and work stoppages are readily employed. Its preference for negotiations and achieving political influence is clearly stimulated by global economic developments of the past decade which have seen trade unions increasingly unable to use strikes as a weapon. These developments include the growing presence of subcontractors with precarious work contracts, the absence of legislation protecting striking workers from dismissal, and most importantly the ease with which employers are able to shift their labour-intensive production lines to other countries when costly labour disputes occur.

The influence of this thinking on the WWUG and its choices of strategies is evident from interviews with long-time members. For example, when asked about effective union strategies, Suganta from Rangsit (north of Bangkok) states: "I would not suggest any protest like stopping our work, until the end of a case. I would try everything possible to negotiate with the employer first."[6] Keeping in mind the need for co-existence of employer and worker and recognising the dangers of union activism, the WWUG appears to focus its activities on improving skills and knowledge among leaders and shop stewards with several years of experience. During its earlier campaign for maternity leave, the group still engaged in innovative forms of protest such as staging a march of pregnant women. However, almost ten years after its establishment, the WWUG works primarily to increase institutionalisation of women workers' struggles, by negotiating with employers and government and avoiding the use of more disruptive or violent means of protest. But as a consequence, many potential members have the impression that the WWUG has been co-opted by the Thai government and therefore is incapable of pushing for the dramatic reforms seemingly needed to raise the welfare and living standards of workers.

In sharp contrast, the WWLG practises collective action that is clearly influenced by a radical leftist ideology. Somyod Pruksakasemsuk, the head of CLIST who started the WWLG, expresses his anti-business sentiments without hesitation. His explanation for the need to establish a women's group rests on radical Marxist (or perhaps Trotskyist) inspired ideals of class-based struggle and the urgency of overthrowing a capitalist and patriarchal

elite that is unable and unwilling to work in the interest of workers. Somyod asserts that "Thai capitalists are able to go on golf vacations in other countries, while we assemble electronic pieces in the factories as our bosses yell insults like, 'hurry up, Buffalo, work faster!'"(TLC 2001). He calls on the labour movement to use radical action such as factory take-overs, shut-outs and strikes, rather than negotiations with employers that are bound to fail and to perpetuate the interests of the ruling class.[7]

WWLG members are therefore encouraged to compare their wages to the price of the products they produce for the export market, leading them to realise that their wages are unfair and motivating them to engage in protests.[8] Although such radical actions are not enacted by all WWLG members, they are nevertheless a clear indication of the perspective that informs the group's efforts and the target of its contention (employers). While this group was never involved in general public protests like the WWUG, its members have ample experience in organising and leading strikes, lock-out action and other forms of disruptive protests, as well as more moderate activities such as support for fellow factory workers on strike and workers' education for radical change in the future.

The WWLG aims most of its mobilisation work towards young women workers who may already be union members but not leaders and whose knowledge of the labour movement and analysis of the causes of poverty and oppression are still minimal. Prospective members are approached through discussion about their immediate needs and problems, most often related to family, finances, and friendships in and around the factory. Extensive discussion of these topics results in a degree of confidence and mutual trust in these study groups which allows organisers to broach topics such as global capitalism and labour rights, and the connections between these and 'the personal'.[9] Not surprisingly, according to my interviews with them, many WWLG members see their position in the production process as an indication of the injustices to which marginalised groups are subjected in Thailand. Rather than pursuing a strong negotiating position at the institutional level, WWLG organisers at the factory level therefore focus on forming new unions or strengthening existing unions through training and advice, especially among women workers. In carrying out such activities, the WWLG enjoys a relatively independent position, since its affiliation is limited to a few small but committed international NGOs (as mentioned in Section Two).

These two trajectories demonstrate that the choice of repertoires of contention may be related to the prevailing political and economic environment, but that it cannot be predicted by this environment. Instead, it is factors such as ideology, donor relations, and organisational structure that configure the potential for mobilisation of women workers in Thailand. Clearly, WWUG members are encouraged to educate their peers about the importance of negotiations rather than strike, whereas in contrast ideology drives the WWLG to take a radical path through disruptive action and alternative means of education. In each case, as this chapter will demonstrate, gender identity plays a crucial role.

Collective challenges: Issues for mobilisation

With respect to Thai women's activism, Varaporn Chamsanit argues that because of their multiple and urgent basic needs, "grassroots women cannot afford to focus on a single issue such as gender equality" (1998:56). Although it could be argued that gender equality is never a single issue, does Varaporn's finding also hold for collective, urban industrial protest? Are gender issues raised in women workers' protests and do they provide women workers with sufficient motivation to join trade unions? Answering these questions would give important insights into whether gender identity motivates women workers to undertake collective action.

Practical issues

When we examine the issues raised by the two Thai women workers' groups, it immediately becomes clear that the demands they put forward *to the government* or to the larger public are substantially different from the issues around which union women try to mobilise *fellow women workers* on a day-to-day basis. Among the WWUG, the former in 2001-3 consisted of four issues: government funding for child care centres in factories, a higher proportion of women in decision-making on labour issues, unemployment insurance, and an independent occupational safety and health institute for Thai workers.[10] The WWLG, in contrast, has a more general platform of unionising workers to fight against neo-liberal capitalism and globalisation. But when it comes to mobilisation efforts,

members of the WWUG and WWLG alike direct most of their attention towards wages, working conditions, and industrial relations disputes.

The promise of solving practical problems and improving working conditions usually forms the starting-point for union organisers in their appeals to members. For example, Daeng from northern Bangkok recounts in an interview with me how her factory's trade union lost many members when she as the union's president unsuccessfully demanded a salary rise for all workers. A few years later, however, she managed to introduce a loan fund for union members, leading to a huge influx of new members.[11] The importance of addressing urgent practical problems is also shown by Theobald (1997) who found women workers in Lampang (northern Thailand) mobilising around health hazards. Generally, my interviews suggest that when faced with a case of injustice or inequality which has an immediate impact on their lives, workers realise that they cannot solve the case as individuals but instead need to unite and form a trade union. If presented with new resources or new types of support, as in the case of Daeng's union, workers are evidently willing to sign up for union membership.

However, not only wage and health issues but also women's issues may trigger protests by women workers, particularly when they coincide with life-cycle stages that put extra demands on them. For example, when asked if her union's agenda includes women's issues, Tao (from a plastic wares factory) complains that women workers do not see women's issues as their priorities until they are directly confronted with them: "It's only when they get pregnant that they come to us, otherwise they don't care" about women's issues.[12] In another example, Thai Airways women workers in 2001 urged their company to institute a policy against sexual harassment and in the early 1990s demanded the same retirement age for men and women, but have at other times mobilised around wage issues and job security more generally.[13] According to Tew, a former factory worker now with CLIST and the WWLG, mainstream unions are "just concerned about unemployment benefits, they just care about economic issues ... but we have some demands for pregnant women" such as provision of child care facilities, child support benefits and leave with pay for pregnant workers.[14] Thus, women workers appear to agitate around clusters of work and gender-related issues rather than single issues. What influences the choice of issues and how is this related to collective identities in social movements?

Given the frequency with which workers mobilise around *practical* issues, it can perhaps be argued that, similar to Australian workers, according MacManus (1997), Thai women workers follow a service model of trade unionism, instead of being attracted to collective organising based on ideological affinity. Indeed, it is a common complaint by Thai labour leaders and observers that if workers are not shown results by the union, they have little concern for unity in their union and will not readily pay dues. In the words of Bundit, a highly respected labour researcher from the private Arom Pongpangan Foundation: "In Thailand, we don't really have strong ideals for fighting: we don't have strong workers' consciousness, an ideology of workers."[15]

Yet, perhaps Bundit and his male colleagues overlook a crucial variable that explains why many women workers focus on practical issues. Writing about women's grassroots movements worldwide, Kaplan (1997) argues that women are more involved than men in practical community action because the gender division of labour assigns them greater responsibility for household welfare. This leads them to act for survival and enables them to make demands for the benefit of their families and communities. Based on this view, it would seem that in accordance with the grievance perspective, women will support and join social movement organisations such as trade unions when the survival and well-being of their family or community is threatened. In other words, women may organise not (only) because of ideological commitment but in order to fulfill their practical gender roles (cf. Molyneux 1985). A clear example is the severe environmental threat and damage to their sources of livelihood that have compelled women (and men) living in poverty in the Northeast of Thailand to join the Assembly of the Poor, an advocacy and lobby network on poverty and environment issues (Missingham 2003).[16] Another example is the support and advocacy group that has been established with help from Bangkok-based NGO Friends of Women by women workers from the manufacturing sector who are suffering from occupational diseases (CAW 2000; Brown 2001).

Nevertheless, not all union women have personally experienced such threats to their practical gender roles and not all women who have experienced them have joined social movements. Thus, personal life experiences or grievances alone offer only a partial explanation for women workers' activism in social movements and the identities and

interests that unite them. Furthermore, Thai unions are not always successful in winning concessions for their members, yet despite such failures many still retain their core membership. It is therefore likely that union members are motivated by a combination of idealism, practical concerns, and identifications that arise from conscious attempts to make them feel part of the movement.

In reality, practical concerns cannot be neatly separated into either gender or work/workers' interests, since work issues necessarily have a gender dimension. Low wages become a women's issue because – as union women point out to me – women often carry the main financial responsibility for their households. Similarly, the shift to subcontracting affects women workers more than men, since women are often (classified as) less skilled and thus more easily replaced by temporary workers or asked to continue production from their homes (Oxfam 2004a). In response to my question what are women's issues for her, Tew from the WWLG talks about the women she works with:

> In their opinion, workers' problems are women's issues. They will prioritise the problems by themselves. I cannot point out which problem is a woman's issue and which one a labour issue, since some male workers would say that I do not care about workers' issues. I understand that it should go together, solving women's problems and workers' problems ... But [with an issue like child care centers] we first have to make [the men] understand that it is a workers' issue, not only a women's problem. Men usually say, why do we have to demand child care centers? Mostly they think that this is a family issue, so it has nothing to do with the employers. Some men even said, why should employers take responsibility for this issue, because they did not make those women workers pregnant! But women can see that the family burden links to their work ability, because they have to spend time on household work, so they have less time to earn a living.[17]

Similarly, Pearson and Theobald write of women workers in Northern Thailand:

> While [they] express considerable anxiety about the forms of control and sexualized management practices in Japanese and American owned factories these workers' main concerns are for their wages and working conditions in the factories, their safety and comfort in their dormitories, their homesickness and separation from their families and very significantly, the impact of working in electronics factories on their health and reproductive futures (1998:989).

Although workers' issues can thus be interpreted as women's issues and vice versa, mainstream trade unions are not always receptive to this continuum of gender-related needs and interests expressed by women workers and its impact on the trade union. For example, Somyod of CLIST complains that many male union leaders do not see the connection

between seemingly non-labour issues such as domestic violence and the union: "Some wives got beaten up by their husbands, and they came to the union to ask for help, but the union said, just leave that issue alone because it's not really a union issue."[18] Instead, he and his colleagues argue that it is precisely a labour and union issue because of its impact on productivity, on women's attendance at union activities, and on women's potential capacity for union leadership.

Thus, the issues raised by Thai women workers defy categorisation as either women's/gender interests or workers' (economic) issues. Rather than single issues, it is clusters of practical issues that women workers agitate around, in conjunction with idealism and threats to their well-being and livelihoods. However, whether these practical issues resonate with movement members and how (and how many) members act on them are determined in part by how union leaders and activists construct them to create a common purpose.

Mobilising around interests or identity?

If we examine the interpretation and attribution of social problems put forward by the WWUG, we hear at times a distinct affirmation of the need to represent women's interests, but at other times a rejection of using women's separate interests as a mobilising strategy. WWUG members do not project consensus about whether or when to utilise women's interests as a mobilising strategy.

As mentioned earlier, there are indeed recognisable women's demands that could give rise to sufficient feelings of injustice to result in collective mobilisation. The WWUG mobilised thousands of women workers around the need for maternity leave, and tried to do the same with the need for child care during its 2001-2002 campaigns. But consider Wilaiwan, the current president of the WWUG, who in an interview with me states that there is no need to bring up any separate women's issues on May Day, because men and women "are all workers." The WWUG is therefore "concerned about every type of labour issue, and not only about women's issues." When asked how she wants to be remembered, she responds: "as a worker who has fought for the rights and well-being of other workers and for the good of society."[19] However, on a different occasion she states that:

> Women have more burden than men ... We have to look at the root of women's problems ... Those issues that we worked in the past are workers' issues, but right now we aim to focus on women's issues. We are a women's group so we have to focus more on our issues ... Because we are workers and we are a big group in society, we need to have our own representative ... We women workers have been violated sexually all the time, but nobody can speak out for us.[20]

Wilaiwan is by no means exceptional in her refusal to valorise women's interests as the primary means of mobilisation. Wanpen, a former WWUG president, states that there are no specific problems for women workers, and that the focus of the group's work should be on strengthening the labour movement as a whole, since all of the workers are concerned about rising unemployment.[21] A fifty-seven-year old female member of the (majority female) Thai Krieng Durable factory union told me more generally: "I take part in this strike action [against our dismissal] because I fight for our own rights and benefits as *workers*, and for the next generation to have better rights."[22] Thus, although the WWUG unites women workers and at times highlights women's superior leadership qualities and women's life experiences in order to stimulate mass mobilisation, it often refuses to base its mobilisation efforts on the notion of distinct women's interests. This situation raises questions about the meanings ascribed by the WWUG to the term 'women.'

One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that in times of declining strength, the trade union movement makes it difficult for these women workers to claim an active voice based on a politicised gender identity. To do so would mean firstly to be accused of adding to the fragmentation of the movement. Secondly, this pressure to appear in consensus about the goal of the movement also informs the naming of women activists themselves. Certainly, most women activists would consider the label 'feminist' to be damaging to their reputations, hence the framing of issues as being in the general interest. For example, although (or perhaps because) she is arguably the most senior woman in the union movement, Arunee does not want to call herself a feminist, since this would be interpreted as fighting only for women's rights. To the contrary, she professes: "I am a real worker, that is in my blood."[23] Similarly, Tew from the WWLG says, "the goal is not only for women workers, the goal is to liberate the workers in general ... if you choose only the women's issues, some men are going to claim discrimination."[24]

The intense pressure to avoid internal conflicts and increase the effectiveness of the labour movement as a whole are significant reasons for the legitimacy accorded to union women if they mobilise workers around a workers' – rather than a gender – identity. Chantana, a trade union activist in northern Bangkok working for an ACILS project on child care centres, recognises this dilemma. When asked if she defines herself as a feminist, she replies: "I personally want to fight for the workers in general, but in some part I want to emphasise only the women's issues, because I am a woman, so I see the trouble we face."[25] It is likely that these union women are aware of the importance of their legitimacy as workers, as they try to gain access to decision-making structures. Although they do not sacrifice women's or gender issues to further their own goals, they do appear to adjust their mobilisation strategies according to the likely response from male union leadership.

Thus, context and audience influence how union women frame and name their issues. When trying to expand factory-based membership and to appeal for collective action, they speak about gender inequality and respond to women's complaints, for example about maternity leave or child care. Yet, among leaders and activists, *women* workers' interests are not privileged and instead are articulated as the same as men's. Indeed, a clear majority of the women leaders and activists interviewed for this research want to be recognised by society as workers' activists and do not claim an active voice as women *per se*. Rather than indicating an acceptance of hegemonic discourse that privileges men's interests or a lack of gender consciousness, this refusal to privilege women's interests perhaps points to the difficulties facing union women in balancing women's and worker identities at institutional and leadership levels.

Such navigating between identities and interests brings us back to Jonasdottir's and Phillips' arguments (see pp.62-66) that women's interests in a political sense can be conceptualised as consisting of 'being among' those making decisions (the form aspect or 'politics of presence') and of particular, expressed needs (the content aspect). Mobilisation of women workers into trade unions in Thailand appears to aim for recognition and is largely based on achieving a 'politics of presence'. In other words, union women construct feelings of solidarity and common purpose among women workers so that their numerical strength, rather than their particular issues, can persuade trade union leaders to take women seriously as leaders and members in the movement.

By and large, Thai union women appear to expect potential women members to act upon their sense of being workers rather than of being women, although they also attempt to make a new women worker identity available and relevant. The collective identity expressed by these union women has a greater basis in a workers' identity than in a gender identity. Although gender training could help activate gender identity as a meaningful platform for collective action, as a few Thai union women stated in interviews with me,[26] limited funds mean that NGOs offering such training have only been able to reach a small group of union women. Thus, while Thai women workers experience (and express) interests both as women and as workers, their membership in the collective of women is passive and "defined by routine practices and habits" (Young 1995:110). They therefore identify with other women based on common experiences only to a limited extent. In contrast, union women experience bonds of solidarity with other workers and being a worker is ostensibly "a badge of pride and identity" rather than passive membership in a collectivity or "a social facticity about the material conditions of one's life" (Young 1995:113).

Although many Thai union women experience gender largely as 'seriality' and thus do not act upon it collectively as frequently as they act upon their worker identity, gender identity is nevertheless important in myriad indirect ways. That women workers frequently do not act upon the discrimination they observe and experience as women may be because of their reluctance to be identified as feminists or as part of the mainstream women's movement that is often regarded as elitist (see pp.123-5). It may also be because typically feminine qualities are frequently devalued in Thai society or remain unrewarded, as the next section will show. Thus, it is worthwhile to examine the various strategies employed by union women to build and sustain their movement for further insights concerning the importance of identity in women workers' mobilising.

Drawing on common purpose

Women union leaders and activists must be capable of attracting movement members and supporters, for membership distinguishes individual protest from sustained, contentious action on a large scale with an oppositional goal. Tarrow writes that "it is in struggle that

people discover which values they share, as well as what divides them" (1998:122), although this process is by no means an automatic outcome of mounting collective challenges. How do women workers employ the above-mentioned practical issues to create resonance with potential and actual members? The process of transforming the emotions and feelings at the root of people's willingness to act collectively into recognition of common goals shows specific characteristics for women and involves identities, yet does not necessarily involve appeals or challenges to gender identity.

Emotions

Interviews with activists in the greater Bangkok area show that women workers' motivation to engage in activism arises from sources as diverse as life-cycle events, family situation, and personal political opinions. This heterogeneity in motivation is a reminder of the different social and economic locations of women workers. Yet, one common factor articulated by these union women is their strong emotional engagement in relation to the issues at stake, whether these are economic, political, or social. As Taylor asserts with reference to the American lesbian movement, emotions are the "site for articulating the links between cultural ideas, structural inequality, and individual action" (1995:227). Similarly, the WWUG and the WWLG turn emotions into concrete motivation for activism by women workers.

Emotions may emerge from the personality of movement members, as argued by the dispositional perspective of social movement theory. For example, Daeng, a local union leader in the northern industrial areas of Bangkok in her thirties, describes herself as "a crazy woman who wants to fight", a trait she has shown since her teenage years.[27] She joined the union because she saw a connection between her own disposition and the union's fight for better working conditions. Women activists and leaders like Daeng are attracted to the union because of strongly held ideals which may range from general perceptions of justice (or more frequently questioning the occurrence of injustice) to dreams of a society characterised by gender equality. Individuals imbued since childhood with such strong dispositions are more likely than those without such dispositions to search for a place where they can contribute to a larger struggle (Snow and McAdam 2000). The women

workers' movement thus becomes a place that gives positive meaning to their identity as a fighter.

Others are stimulated into action by the injustices they experience or observe around them, which somewhat corresponds to the classical 'grievance' perspective in social movement theory. For example, Oy, a former union leader in a textile factory, became so enraged by her employer's frequent and blatant disregard of labour laws that she joined the union.[28] Similarly, Suganta from the northern outskirts of Bangkok strives for a better and fairer world through trade union activism, a claim that was repeated by many other union women.[29] As noted Thai academic Pasuk has observed with respect to Thai social movements more generally, these women workers mobilise around "universally acceptable concepts" (2002:16) such as social justice and fairness in order to explain their activism and get others involved.

Thus, in the majority of cases the strong feelings that union women bring to their activism are predicated on general concepts and dispositions rather than a particular gender identity. This use of "universally applicable concepts" has also been noted by academic Pasuk Phongpaichit in relation to Thai social movements (see p.115). An exception are the few women workers who were stimulated to engage in social activism because of traditional feelings of obligation and "repayment of merit." For example, Tao from Bangkok "feel[s] more worth" because as a union member she is "working for others" while at the same time "getting more money" for her relatives.[30] Other women union leaders mention that their social standing in their immediate surroundings has increased as a result of their activism, despite initial resistance by parents and friends. Since women have fewer opportunities than men to gain spiritual merit because they are denied the chance to become monks (or a fully-fledged equivalent), some have turned to social justice work to satisfy their need for merit. Still, while these feelings are brought on by a particular gender identity (of women who are socialised to feel good about serving others), only very few women mentioned them in my interviews as their motivation for involvement in trade unions.

Few women workers interviewed for this research explicitly declare having strong emotions about gender equality. Yet, does this mean that women workers care little about unequal gender relations in and outside the workplace? The possibility that women workers

choose not to speak about gender inequality as their motivation for collective action, for fear of being labelled 'feminist' or trespassing boundaries of what is culturally acceptable, was noted earlier. Because the previous section demonstrated that women workers in practice agitate around a combination of work(place) and gender issues, perhaps Thai women workers consider gender inequality to be part of a broader system of hierarchy.[31] It is worthwhile repeating Van Esterik's observation:

> The rigidity that appears on the surface of Thai gender interactions is permeated by asexual power differentials that form the basis of gender hierarchies as of other hierarchies. What is fixed is the importance of power in all relationships, not sexual orientation ... Hierarchy is more important than gender in this and other situations. That is, gender signifies in combination with power (1999:280).

Thus, although women workers are perhaps different from their male colleagues in being motivated by strong emotions, gender is not necessarily central in these emotions. Rather, these emotions are stimulated by a concern for social justice and human rights and as such consider gender inequality in close relation to other inequalities in Thai society.

Group construction and recognition

In the face of persistent hostility and distrust from many male union leaders, how do women workers create feelings of togetherness among the women they try to mobilise? If, as Tarrow (1998) suggests, group recognition – both among members and by the wider public – is one of the crucial properties of social movements, then we need to ask how it is constructed and what role subjectivities and identity play in this process. Taylor and Whittier (1992) and Taylor (1995) argue that creating boundaries and distinctions between in-group and outsiders is an important strategy to heighten collective identification by members and to increase feelings of belonging, When we consider how women union leaders and activists create boundaries to distinguish their members and to build feelings of common purpose, a potential link between common purpose and identity emerges. Among women from both the industrial and service sector unions, creating boundaries occurs on a regular basis through a lively and widespread discourse extolling women's qualities as trade unionists. This discourse not only reinforces these women's conviction that they are needed (and have a legitimate place) in the wider union movement, but also justifies organising as women and with other women. In the process, they navigate precariously and

carve out a niche between a dominant gender identity of women as inferior and not belonging in the public sphere, and workers' (and union) identity that is decidedly masculine and often linked to violence and unrest.

Though at times they may constitute signs of the performative aspects of identity, women's superior qualities as trade unionists – and often also as human beings in general – are evidently felt based on the answers by many Thai union women to questions about the differences between male and female union leaders. Their statements encompassed a range of qualities: women are more honest than men, less aggressive and therefore more capable of planning and coordinating, better at listening to members and responding to their needs, and more persistent than male trade unionists. Daeng, a union leader from an animal feed factory, believes that "men have less sense of responsibility: they just love to socialise and drink."[32] Sanae, a former worker and now a member of the Young Christian Workers,[33] considers that although "men are more decisive, get to the point and make decisions", "women leaders have more understanding of the situation and of the problem, and they do not only see money and financial issues; they see the problem in detail, they see the health issues, and they are concerned about the condition of the workplace."[34]

On account of their persistence, their dedication to their tasks, and their more intimate relations with workers, women leaders are said to be better able to attract members. According to labour organiser Bandith from the Bangkok-based NGO Friends of Women (FoW) who works with industrial women workers around Bangkok and in the South, there are generally stronger feelings of solidarity among women than among men, because women are more willing to sacrifice and stick together.[35] Such skills are of wider importance for the union movement. Numerous women interviewed for this research stated that the effectiveness of negotiations with management – traditionally one of the most important union activities – improved with the presence of women in the team. From seeking quick deals with management to stubbornly refusing to compromise on relatively trivial matters, most women union leaders could readily recount examples of men failing their unions during negotiations. Finally, these women considered women generally to be better at solving problems because they tend to examine the issues from various angles, including based on their own experiences outside their workplace.

The allegedly superior qualities of women union leaders extend to the issue of corruption. Former WWUG president Arunee states that women workers are more honest:

> I have seen so many male leaders being bribed but I have never heard of women leaders accepting bribes. If male leaders are offered money, they will be selfish and receive it. They will think that the owner does not like them anyway, so why not take the money and leave? They do not consider the members who are waiting outside the negotiation room.[36]

Bandith from FoW sees women's diverging concept of power as the reason for these differences: while groups of male workers may initially be strong in terms of organisation, men's quest for individual power and their greater involvement or interest in politics causes many of these groups to succumb to bribery. In contrast, women are said not to search for power for themselves, because they have less pride.[37]

Whether these qualities really exist and if so, what causes them is difficult to say with certainty. Thai women are certainly socialised to be polite and acquiescent, and to control their emotions, and these skills can be used in negotiations to mask their strong determination with conciliatory gestures (Van Esterik 1999). Arunee, the former president of the WWUG and the Thai Krieng factory union, recounts her successful experiences in negotiating with her former employer. In the early 1990s, the female members of the negotiation team in the Thai Krieng garment factory decided to approach the elderly Chinese owner of the factory like "daughters asking their father for more money ... That changed the [atmosphere of the] meeting and changed the negotiations, it became easier and better."[38] It thus appears that union women may employ a number of gendered characteristics or tactics that society assigns to them, when they expect it to work to their advantage. In the process, they also create boundaries and define who belongs to the movement.

Such differentiation between women and men does not necessarily constitute essentialisation of women's identity. Women workers' social support networks, as well as women activists' own experiences in daily life, in particular their efforts to combine often heavy household responsibilities with union activism, enable them to understand and have empathy for the situation of other women in their workplace. Recognizing the link between what are widely perceived to be 'just women's issues,' such as the need for child care or reproductive health, and working conditions or quality of work, these women activists are

well placed to respond to women's concerns. Men, on the other hand, are frequently accused by women activists of overlooking such linkages and refusing to acknowledge, for example, employers' shared responsibility for child care facilities or the impact of women's household burden on their work productivity.

It is also possible that women leaders develop such problem-solving skills and commitment through their long experience with juggling multiple tasks in the household, the workplace, and the community. Alternatively, arguably only the strongest and most capable women make it to the higher echelons of the union structure, thereby potentially skewing the general picture of Thai union women. Whichever is the case, this discourse of female superiority shows that group recognition by members is built on values that are considered typically female and/or assigned to women by substantial sections of Thai society.

Introducing these values to trade unions constitutes a useful means to create a sense of belonging for women, and to create a justification for women's activism in trade unions. Daeng (from the animal feed factory in Rangsit) offers a glimpse of how such discourse of women's leadership qualities contributes to solidarity among women. While men may think they are smarter than women and that women "should keep quiet and be listeners," She says that the women themselves demonstrate that such qualities will work to women's advantage in mobilising other women and addressing women's personal problems.[39] Thus, these union women play up women's traditional gender roles as caretaker of the family and household, as financial manager, and as pillar of support for the family. By making the skills of negotiation and planning, which are so often honed in the household, relevant to the trade union setting, women union leaders encourage women workers to feel part of an exclusive group and to contribute to society and the social good. Through articulation of a distinctly new women worker identity, they aim to give these women a voice in the labour movement, thereby creating possibilities for re-envisioning union activism in Thailand, distinct from its current association with corruption, co-optation, and general ineffectiveness.

Building solidarity

Group cohesion and the success of collective action depend in part on solidarity between members. Social movement leaders must therefore not only tap into emotions and feelings of group membership but also construct and employ meanings that will resonate with movement members. In all of these actions, there is a clear distinction between efforts to mobilise ever greater numbers of women workers into the movement organisations, and attempts to improve women union leaders' position vis-à-vis male leaders. But in both these 'internal' and 'outward' mobilisation efforts Thai women workers' groups must take account of dominant gender identities and workers' identities. The following examples of framing show how women workers at times make selective use of dominant gender identities and at other times challenge gender and/or economic regimes. Such efforts may involve influential actors such as academics, and may employ international human rights language.

Framing

In Tarrow's words, framing refers to the process of "inscribing grievances in overall frames that identify an injustice, attribute the responsibility for it to others, and propose solutions to it is a central activity of social movements" (1998:111). How has the WWUG framed its issues over the years? With reference to the WWUG's maternity leave campaign, former president and union leader Arunee observes that "the three most important parts to make any campaign successful are the topic, the presentation and the public having a joint benefit."[40] If this is the case, then perceptions of women's interests in Thai society and economy can explain a great deal about the presentation of issues, in other words, the frames used by women union leaders and activists to legitimise their campaigns and to attract supporters. Women workers use frames to construct meaning about events and situations, but in doing so are tied in various ways to gender identity and gender roles. How do they position themselves in relation to dominant gender and economic regimes as described in Chapters Four and Five, and (how) can they utilise these regimes to generate new meanings?

If we contrast the early WWUG campaign on maternity leave with the group's more recent demands for child care centres, the importance of considering framing in the context of gender and economic regimes becomes clear. The campaign on maternity leave during the late 1980s and early 1990s clearly benefited from the non-threatening nature of the issue, which was widely seen as a right befitting all 'proper' (i.e. married) women. The involvement of doctors, female civil servants, and academics in the public debates on the need for maternity leave emphasised the serious nature of the issue, and their alliance with women workers strengthened the impression that women workers were 'respectful women.' Moreover, it was important to represent maternity leave as a public benefit, rather than an individual right. As Wanpen, a former WWUG president puts it, "how important it is to breast-feed children, that's what all the employers cannot argue about ... we focus on the children, the better quality [of life] of the child."[41] In interviews for this research, several union women involved in the campaign stressed that if they had advocated for maternity leave as an individual right, they would have risked the withdrawal of such a right during times of economic hardship or its denial for women deemed 'not deserving' (such as unmarried mothers or women from low-income backgrounds having a large number of children).

The equally public nature of the demand for child care centres is underlined by Jaded, a labour activist from Friends of Women:

> I see this issue as a follow-up to our campaign on maternity leave ... We have to show the public that it is a societal benefit, not an individual but a public interest issue ... If there is no daycare, what will happen to the children?[42]

Clearly, by portraying this as a public issue, Jaded hopes to draw more attention from all sectors of society in a similar way as was done in the maternity leave campaign. He highlights his strategy of putting forward generally phrased demands for the labour movement such as child care centres or expansion of the social security system, which will facilitate the formation of a broad-based labour coalition but will especially benefit women workers.

Similarly, Wilaiwan (the current WWUG president) positions child care within a broader concern about the future of Thai society:

> [Child care] is also society's problem ... Children without parents will grow up to be aggressive and will become social problems later. If sent up-country, they will not pay respect to their parents, that will destroy the family culture ... and they will be a social burden for this society ... Actually the labour movement should prioritize this issue as well, since this is a woman's issue and most of the workers are women. If women workers have the centre to take care of their children, this will benefit the children, the workers in general, and the union's work. After we won maternity leave, we started to think about the next step of new-born babies. Babies need a guardian but their mothers need to go to work. If babies are sent up-country, it is not good for their physical and psychological health. They need milk from their mother at least one year ... [If they breastfeed] the children will not be aggressive, they will have a good brain, they will have a good relationship with their parents.[43]

However, it can be argued that the WWUG is perhaps not successful in its demand for child care centres as a result of the new economic regime that now dominates. This regime is characterised by the centrality of neo-liberal economic policies in Thailand that paradoxically advocate individual responsibility while counting on families to support unemployed or dismissed workers and workers' dependents. As feminists have pointed out elsewhere (Brodie 1994; Marchand and Runyan 2000), this economic regime is gendered, as it assumes amongst other things a gender division of labour in which women engage in unpaid caring work. Thus, the articulation and naming of particular injustices and grievances take place against the backdrop of particular societal and economic norms and values pertaining to women's and men's roles and responsibilities.

The case of dismissed Thai Krieng (Durable) factory workers provides another clear example of the complexities of framing in the context of gender and workers' identities. The language used on the Thai Labour Campaign website to document the struggle of the Thai Krieng Union is remarkable for its use of gender 'imagery'. The background information about the case emphasises repeatedly that the women workers fired without compensation are 'middle-aged' and have no employment options left due to blacklisting, though many still have to support their families:

> One of the things that the company underestimates is the tight relationships of these women workers. Most are over 40 years old and 30% are single. Considering that many of these workers have been working for Thai Durable Textile for more than 20 years, seeing each other every day and sleeping in the same quarters, the company is like a home to them and the union like family. They have sacrificed many of their life's opportunities for the company's growth. Many have not been able to get married due to working 12 hours a day for twenty years in a mostly female environment. It is difficult to have the energy to go out and socialize after long strenuous work days (TLC 2001).

This personalised discourse of suffering fits well with cultural expectations presented in Chapter Five, according to which women will sacrifice their own happiness to repay their debt of gratitude to their parents and, by extension, equally to their employers for the economic benefits obtained through their employment. Yet in this case it has become a source of strength in the face of labour oppression: "It is due to these life sacrifices that workers have made, their close friendship to each other, and their belief in work with dignity and fairness, and the understanding of the importance of the Thai Krieng Union in the Thai labour movement that they continue their struggle" (TLC 2001). Similarly, some of the Thai Krieng Union members during their strike called for support from the larger public in the name of their families. One woman who had worked for twenty-nine years with the factory appealed by saying: "Please think of our children. Because it was not only us who face the impact [of the dismissal] but it also involves our children" (TLC 2001, report on press conference held on 29 September 2000).

This NGO's efforts at legitimising women workers' demands correspond clearly with dominant Thai cultural notions of appropriate womanhood that should be rewarded with justice and kindness, rather than oppression and exploitation.[44] The WWUG, on the other hand, attempted to increase the appeal of maternity leave and child care by describing them as public rather than private issues, thus challenging traditional notions of motherhood as a private responsibility. A very different example is provided by current WWUG president Wilaiwan who argues that women should become more active in decision-making. However, she promotes this idea not on the basis of women's special needs, but through the use of national and international language on gender equality:

> I think [the need for women's representation] is not hard to explain since we can see so much discrimination against women. We can make claims based on the [1997] constitutional law and also many international conventions. We can say this is an issue of gender equality.[45]

Thus, as Keck and Sikkink (1998) have pointed out, concepts and language concerning human rights and gender that circulate transnationally can help local groups to frame their issues in socially acceptable ways or can help increase the legitimacy of demands.

These cases show that, while "the 'text' of movement messages relates to the *con*text of interests and conflicts in play" (Tarrow 1998:107) it also relates to dominant economic and gender regimes at the local, national, and international level. When women workers feel unable to challenge these dominant regimes, they may choose to co-opt the identities that flow from them and use them strategically for their own benefit, as has been shown by feminists with regard to motherhood in Latin America in particular (Radcliffe 1993).

Sustaining the movement

Once a movement has been established, has gained recognition from members and opponents alike, and has found and selected issues that compel large numbers to undertake contentious collective action, the challenge becomes how to keep this momentum going. Tarrow writes:

> It is only by sustaining collective action against antagonists that a contentious episode becomes a social movement. Common purposes, collective identities, and identifiable challenges help movements to do this; but unless they can maintain their challenge, they will either evaporate into the kind of individualistic resentment that James Scott calls 'resistance' (1985), harden into intellectual or religious sects, or retreat into isolation (Tarrow 1998:3).

Although organisational structure is also of importance in generating solidarity, I discuss it here because the current choice facing Thai union women – between autonomy and affiliation – reflects one of the most challenging aspects of sustaining their movement. The ongoing debate regarding the advantages and disadvantages of organisational autonomy versus affiliation with mainstream unions can tell us much about how women workers look at themselves, their movement, and other social movements. In discussing their options, union women (especially those from the WWUG) show clearly how they are constrained but at the same time guided by their identity as women and as workers.

Autonomy or affiliation?

At the time of its establishment, gender interests were clearly on the minds of the women leaders who initiated the WWUG. Organising around the demand for maternity leave in the formal sector meant that the alliance crossed class divisions, with women factory workers participating side by side with public servants and seeking advice from medical experts,

academics, and lawyers. The choice of demand and the language used to articulate it highlighted women's roles as responsible mothers and their role in ensuring a healthy and successful society. Judging by the large number of women workers mobilised in street rallies and protests, the campaign struck a cord among women factory workers and motivated them to act on their identity as women and as workers.

In 2002 – a decade later – the WWUG broadened its demands by including two general workers' issues: the establishment of an independent occupational safety and health (OSH) institute and unemployment insurance for dismissed workers. While these issues are very relevant for Thai women workers and have a clear gender angle, in their speeches and media statements WWUG leaders portray these as general workers' issues rather than gender *and* workers' issues. In contrast, the other two issues more directly concern gender equality: the establishment of child care centres and measures to increase the participation of women in leadership and decision-making. WWUG leaders thus appear to be reticent about pointing out the gender dimensions of their demands and to be intent on emphasising that their organisation is concerned with workers' issues.[46]

This broadening of demands and the integrated nature of women's and workers' issues remind us that the WWUG perhaps does not consider itself as a women's organisation at all or in the same way that outsiders and observers might do. Women do not necessarily form a predetermined constituency, and groups or organisations that outsiders might see as women's groups, might not name themselves as such for a variety of reasons. Yet through its very name, the WWUG identifies itself as a women's group, and as such it is worthwhile examining what this means both in theory and in practice according to its members.

The current debates about the organisational structure of the WWUG offer useful insights into how its members think about themselves and their organisation. Because the organisation is affiliated with national trade union federations and members participate in WWUG meetings in their capacity as federation officials or members, many members express confusion about the organisation's purpose. Does it champion workers' rights in general or women workers' rights? Or are the two actually one and the same? Organisational structure thus becomes a stage where differences over principles and objectives are discussed.

On the one hand, many union women suspect that women in decision-making in unions or elsewhere will not necessarily be sensitive to the concerns of other women. Unless they also receive gender training, these women will only conform to the patriarchal leadership environment, since trade unions are based on a top-down hierarchical system that requires women to adapt to the environment and structure. When asked if an increase of women in high-level positions in the labour movement would lead to discussion of different issues, one male union organiser from Friends of Women, which funds the WWUG, questions at what level the WWUG should target its assistance. He replies:

> We see that the National Labour Congresses [peak union bodies] are male dominated. Even if we have some women in the Congresses, they cannot yet make any changes now. What I am worried about is whether it is useful or necessary to have women at the Congress level. Maybe it is better if [the WWUG] focuses on women who work at the grassroots level ... The women who are working in the Congresses do not have a clear understanding about gender or women's issues. If they are not clear about what they want to present or what they stand for, they are too weak to resist the Congress system.[47]

When asked if trade unions respond better to complaints of sexual violence if there are more women members and leaders, former WWUG president Arunee similarly cautions:

> I do not say that all women are good and all men are bad. There are exceptions ... Being a woman does not mean that a female leader knows about gender issues ... women leaders should have some type of gender training, otherwise they are going to think like men.[48]

Speaking about autonomous, women-only groups, she warns:

> If women do not have a clear idea about gender, they may be used by men ... People say we have more women involved in politics but it will be useless if those women are not thinking about women's issues, like women in minorities or the prostitution issue.[49]

In other words, WWUG efforts to increase the number of women union leaders could possibly contribute to union women's claims to decision-making based on their right to 'be among', but would not necessarily lead to discussion of any particular women's interests (the 'content' aspect).

A contrasting approach is taken by Suganta, the president of an area union group and a WWUG member, who makes gender identity central in her efforts to mobilise women at

the local union level. Her focus is on strengthening women's factory-level leadership but at the same time transforming it so as to benefit other women workers through greater gender sensitivity (in other words, focus on the 'content' aspect). Such a push from below will probably not have immediate effects on the Thai union movement, but it increases the potential for transformative union politics in the long run. This strategy at the time of the research was under consideration by several WWUG members (and already being implemented by the WWLG).

Suganta's approach raises the question which women and whose interests the women workers' movement aims to represent and with what justification it does so. The above discussion shows that some prefer to focus on workers' issues in general, while others support a particular focus on women workers. During the WWUG's 2002 annual meeting, these difficulties became increasingly clear. One former president of the group opined that "we started to solve women's problems in general; now ... we should focus on women workers' demands, but their main problems are workers' problems."[50] Meanwhile, another senior member of the WWUG objected: "We need cooperation among women workers' groups; that should be our focus, because it is clearer than general issues. 'Women generally' is too broad."[51] The request for WWUG membership by a Thai man in 2003 exacerbated these disagreements, with some women emphasising the need to remain a women-only group while others believed the WWUG to be ready to start cooperating more with male workers.

The WWUG has no easy solution to these basic difficulties of determining the direction of the organisation. On the one hand, women workers' reluctance to add to the fragmentation of the labour movement encourages them to remain affiliated with mainstream trade unions. Former WWUG president Arunee recounts that the WWUG decided against a separate national labour congress with only women members: "As a labour group, we should get together all male and female workers, all together. We should not discriminate against men, because they are labour too."[52] While this has made the WWUG less vulnerable to criticism by mainstream male union leaders and has likely increased its leaders' influence in the labour movement as a whole, this strategy has perhaps weakened the WWUG's capacity of offering a viable alternative to the unions.

On the other hand, mainstream Thai trade unions have often proved ineffective in solving problems experienced by women workers, such as those related to reproductive rights, sexual violence, and discrimination based on gender stereotypes. Many WWUG members in my interviews with them express awareness of these issues and of the need for trade unions to address these problems. In what is perhaps a sign of the group's success at balancing women's and workers' issues and identities, the 2004 International Women's Day rally organised by the WWUG focused on a variety of issues, including assistance to HIV/AIDS sufferers and the unemployed, community-based daycare centres, revision of laws pertaining to women, the initiation of a campaign calling for a law on domestic violence, and an end to discrimination against women in the workplace (*Bangkok Post* 9 March 2004).

Thus, affiliation and autonomy each have specific advantages and disadvantages for WWUG members. Although the WWUG remains affiliated to mainstream unions and its members attend in their capacity as union members, their demands vary with their willingness to be closely associated with the trade union movement. To some extent the future direction taken by the WWUG will be influenced not so much by its mobilising potential towards women workers, but by the coalitions and networks in which the WWUG engages.

Coalitions and networks

If over time, social movements diffuse into society and become institutionalised to a point where their original goals have become forgotten or have changed, then one of the major challenges of successful social movements is to balance the need for adequate organisational infrastructure with the autonomy (or freedom) required to launch strategic forms of action which can mobilise members. These members are often from submerged networks who are part of a movement's constituency (Melucci 1988) but may also be from like-minded groups with whom a movement can build alliances around particular issues to expand its membership (Tarrow 1998:134). A central element in achieving this balance is for social movements to develop a degree of formal organisation while simultaneously maintaining informal ties with other groups that share similar goals.

The WWUG may not lack grass-roots supporters for large-scale events, but few of its members pay dues and attend meetings regularly. In this sense, the WWUG is compelled to seek alliances with social movement or movement organisations to promote its goals. Which organisations it approaches provides useful insights into the identities around which WWUG members mobilise and organise collectively.

Although a women's movement has been active in parts of Thailand since at least the 1930s (see p.123), women's groups have so far not been able to mobilise on a scale seen frequently in Western countries and in South Korea, India, and the Philippines. Some observers of the Thai women's movement consider class divisions as the paramount cause for this anomaly. According to Cook (1998) and Jeffrey (2002), class cleavages to a significant degree shape agendas and influence which issues are termed problematic and which are not, and how they are presented.[53]

Similarly, Sanitsuda Ekachai, Assistant Editor of the English-language daily *Bangkok Post*, in my interview with her, notes that the dependence of middle-class Thai women on the system of inequality to maintain their own socio-economic position, and their implication in the oppression of women factory workers and domestic workers, make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the Thai women's movement to support the labour movement in a genuine and concrete manner.[54] Women's movement observer Dr Chalidaporn Songsamphan of Thammasat University in my interview with her furthermore states that "the older pioneers of the women's movement have a condescending attitude towards other women, such as sex workers, agricultural workers, and lower-class women; they do not listen to these women."[55] Thus, class identity impacts on the dominant perception by the Thai women's movement of labour issues.

In fact, Sanitsuda in my interview urges observers and academics not to blame women workers for what they have not been able to do, but instead to turn their attention towards those who should be collaborating with women workers because of similar gender interests. Such potential collaboration, however, depends very much on *whether* women can discern similarities as women and with *which* women in their community or society. Because most union women have publicly affiliated themselves with the labour movement (through their organisations), women's NGOs often do not see a coalescence of gender identity and

interests with union women. The organisations belonging to the Thai women's movement, in turn, have frequently prioritised issues with little *immediate* relevance for women workers, such as women's right to keep their maiden name after marriage, legislation on sex work, and the formal guarantee of gender equality in the 1997 Thai constitution. While not denying the importance of these issues for all Thai women, my interviews with women trade unionists show that they consider these issues much less crucial to their own lives than wages, working conditions, and substantial and practical legal protection. Some women trade union leaders furthermore complained to me about the treatment they had received from upper- and middle-class Thai women's activists which ranged from being used for purposes of publicity to being utterly ignored during public events.[56] Not surprisingly, as a result many union women turn for mutual support and collaboration in collective action to the labour movement with which they share common concerns and feel more affinity, despite the hindrances many experience at the hands of male leaders.

Despite misgivings about power differentials,[57] union women increasingly collaborate with labour NGOs. One area in which union women engage in such a coalition concerns the informal economy where women face dire circumstances in the face of cost-cutting measures resulting from economic crisis and globalisation. Many older women from garment and textile factories who had been laid-off during the past five years, have taken up subcontracting or manufacturing the same items at home that they used to make in the factory, but without the same level of wages or benefits. Recognising the resulting decrease in membership and the clear continuum between factory workers and home-based workers, the WWUG in 2002 made protection for informal workers its fourth agenda point.[58] As such, it works with HomeNet, a Bangkok–based NGO for informal and home-based workers, as well as directly with women from communities near industrial parks. WWUG president Wilaiwan's rationale for this new focus shows that the interconnected nature of women's and work issues is an important reason for this new collaboration:

> We see [the informal economy] as one of our group's problems too, because we usually see that most of these workers are women. Most of them got fired because they got old. One of our demands is to include those informal workers in the union. We try to support those workers to have welfare according to the labour law. Because we are women, this is one of our problems. We know that normally women have a burden of taking care of their family more than men. Women care more about the well-being of family members. If they are unemployed it will make the burden too much for them.[59]

Such attempts to promote protection for informal workers is one example of the new networks that women workers are trying to build, based on a shared identity as women and as workers. The common purpose behind such action is clear: "to point out that if we do not help those workers to have protection, in the future we will be laid off and the owner will only hire those workers without providing any welfare ... and we will be one of them."[60] This example shows that, for Thai union women, establishing and utilising a network of informal connective structures is a function of the collective identity on which these women have built their organisations, in this case a particular identity as women workers and as members of working-class communities. This is similar to Beckwith's finding that female coalminers and the wives of coalminers during a particular strike were "externally identified as 'women' but identified themselves as "members of striking families and of working-class communities" (Beckwith 1998:151). With respect to the main Thai women's movement, in contrast, union women do not perceive a shared identity as women that could form the basis for a coalition.

Conclusion

The two women workers' groups that have emerged in recent years in and around Bangkok provide insights into efforts by union women in urban formal sector workplaces to mobilise and organise collectively. In their interactions with women workers, many union women focus on practical issues, recognising that women workers may be most preoccupied about questions of survival and redistribution. In their dealings with government and employers, on the other hand, union women raise distinct gender interests in both recognition and redistribution, such as the need for child care centres and for greater involvement of women workers in labour-related decision-making. Field work findings show clearly that the choice and framing of these issues depends strongly on political and economic circumstances at each particular point in time. Issue framing is therefore tactical and situational for these union women.

For them, gender and work interests are closely intertwined. In their mobilising efforts, union women therefore navigate carefully between emphasising gender identity and worker identity or a broader identity as members of working-class communities. They often motivate women workers to join unions by pointing out the contributions they can make

through their special skills and characteristics, and include several gender interests among their demands. But at the same time, many union women refuse to valorise gender interests and gender identity as the primary means of mobilisation.

Although workers' identity becomes central in many mobilising efforts, this does not imply that union women do not challenge dominant gender identities in Thai society. In fact, they continuously do so through their activism in the public sphere as leaders and as organisers. It is worth recalling here, as mentioned in Chapter Three, that other relations of power overlay seemingly egalitarian relations between the sexes in Thailand, creating "multiple contested gender statuses and ideologies rather than of a single system" (Van Esterik 1999:276). Hierarchies based on class, age, education, and rural or urban background come to mind here. It is therefore likely that Thai union women do not conceptualise their organisations as women's groups based on common characteristics as women, but rather see gender and class together as defining their identity and leading to "self-conscious bonds of solidarity" (Young 1995:113). In other words, union women find their gender identity sufficiently meaningful to become a platform for collective action demanding recognition as a group (and therefore accept external characterisation as women) but only in conjunction with other relations of power that they experience in the workplace, in the community, and at home.

In their quest for increased representation of women and women's perspectives in trade unions, the union women interviewed for this research draw on a variety of interests and identities to legitimise their presence. Class divisions have evidently hindered the formation of alliances with women's organisations, whereas a common worker identity has encouraged linkages between women workers and groups such as the urban poor, workers suffering occupational diseases, and farmers. Given the strength of dominant gender and economic regimes that entail individual responsibility for welfare and income-earning for both men and women, union women may also have experienced that challenges to dominant gender identity and efforts to produce more equitable gender relations have been relatively unsuccessful. This shows how the particular forms and expressions of mobilising and organising among union women in Thailand are contingent on the constellations of power produced by gender and economic regimes, as well as other axes of power that affect women workers. For many Thai union women, gender may be no more than 'seriality'

whereas class, together with age and education differences, may lead to specific and shared attributes that can provoke mobilisation and organisation.

[1] Personal interviews, Bangkok 2001-2003; annual WWUG members meeting, Bangkok, 27 January 2002.
[2] Personal interview Somyod Pruksakasemsuk, CLIST, Bangkok, 21 November 2001.
[3] Personal interviews, Bangkok, 2001-2003.
[4] Personal interview Arunee Sirito, Bangkok, 11 January 2002.
[5] Personal interview Somyod Pruksakasemsuk, Bangkok, 21 November 2001.
[6] Personal interview Suganta, Bangkok, 26 October 2001.
[7] Personal interview Somyod Pruksakasemsuk, Bangkok, 21 November 2001.
[8] Personal interview Nok (not real name), Nakhon Nawan, 29 January 2002.
[9] Personal interview Tew, Bangkok, 15 May 2002.
[10] Because the WWUG operates through democratic and representative structures of decision-making, it is assumed here that these issues reflect its members' interests.
[11] Personal interview Daeng (not real name), Rangsit, 11 May 2003.
[12] Personal interview Tao, Bangkok, 25 January 2002.
[13] Personal interview Chamsri Sukchotiwattana, Bangkok, 21 January 2002.
[14] Personal interview Tew, Bangkok, 26 November 2001.
[15] Personal interview Bundit Thonachaisetawut, Bangkok, 25 October 2001.
[16] A point of view corroborated by Nicola Bullard of the international advocacy network Focus on the Global South; personal interview, Bangkok, 22 November 2001.
[17] Personal interview Tew, Bangkok, 26 November 2001.
[18] Personal interview Somyod Pruksakasemsuk, Bangkok, 21 November 2001.
[19] Personal interviews Wilaiwan Saetia, Bangkok (Omnoi-Omyai), 25 October 2001 and 21 April 2003.
[20] Personal interview Wilaiwan Saetia, Bangkok (Omnoi-Omyai), 14 January 2002.
[21] Personal interview Wanpen Premkaew, Bangkok (Phrapradaeng), 19 October 2001.
[22] Personal interview Pin (not real name), Bangkok, 24 January 2002, emphasis added.
[23] Personal interview Arunee Sirito, Bangkok, 29 October 2001.
[24] Personal interview Tew, Bangkok, 26 November 2001.
[25] Personal interview Chantana (Tuk) Surisura, Rangsit, 19 November 2001.
[26] Tao (not real name), who leads a WWLG discussion group for women workers and works in a plastics factory, credits gender training with making her question her position as a woman and as a worker, for example the absence of career options, paid maternity leave, and child care facilities for women workers. Personal interview, Bangkok, 25 January 2002.
[27] Personal interview Daeng (not real name), Rangsit, 13 May 2002.
[28] Personal interview Oy (not real name), Bangkok, 19 October 2001.
[29] Personal interview Suganta, Rangsit, 26 October 2001.
[30] Personal interview Tao (not real name), Bangkok, 25 January 2002.
[31] It is telling that few women union leaders and activists complain about sexual harassment or other forms of overt gender-based discrimination by government officials, whereas many recount being treated as lesser human beings on account of their class status. For example, Wilaiwan states that "the first thing the government does is to see us as lower class with inferior status. It depends on the individual because some can ... see us as human. [But others] look at us as something lower than them, as greedy because we are asking for things" (personal interview, Bangkok, 21 April 2003). Labour researcher Bundit Thonachaisetawut, in his capacity as member of the National Human Rights Commission's labour study sub-committee, similarly believes that employers' abuse of workers "is the result of a culture of power in which employers see workers as low-class people under their rule ... They do not recognize workers' human dignity" (quoted in *Bangkok Post* 1 May 2004).
[32] Personal interview Daeng, Rangsit, 19 November 2001.
[33] In addition to the two major Thai women workers' groups described here, a small group has been established by the Young Christian Workers (YCW) in and around Bangkok. YCW Thailand is part of the International Young Christian Workers, a Catholic organisation active in thirteen countries in Asia since the 1950s, which holds consultative status in the International Labour Organization but is not affiliated with or consciously supports any trade union federation (Spooner 1989:40-43). YCW's activities in Thailand emphasise education for young women workers in the industrial areas north of Bangkok. Its former field coordinator, Sanae, who is herself a former worker from the garment and textile sector, explains that the group concentrates on offering participatory training to its members on how to handle family and workplace problems. Through such activities for small groups of women workers, YCW also hopes to increase their understanding of the trade union and its image to potential members. Though this very practical approach to

young women workers initially emphasises personal issues, women's and labour rights are central to YCW's vision of women workers' empowerment.

[34] Personal interview Sanae, Rangsit, 22 January 2002.

[35] Personal interview Bandith (Ae) Paenwiset, Bangkok, 26 November 2001.

[36] Personal interview Arunee Sirito, Bangkok, 11 January 2002.

[37] Personal interview Bandith (Ae) Paenwiset, Bangkok, 26 November 2001.

[38] Personal interview Arunee Sirito, Bangkok, 11 January 2002. This case illustrates how workers subversively use hegemonic discourses of labour as "children" who are "the recipients of employers' largesse" (Mills 1999:176). While Arunee and her colleagues do not (or no longer) believe that workers owe their employers a debt of gratitude for their jobs, they recognise advantages in using this discourse because of its potential to put the employer in a position of shame. On the other hand, Theobald (1997) discounts this potential by showing how in Northern Thai factories supposedly 'fatherly' conduct by Japanese employers and managers routinely includes physical and mental abuse.

[39] Personal interview Daeng, Rangsit, 19 November 2001. Some workers enthusiastically confirm the positive image of women union leaders. One woman from the Thai Krieng factory union who was fired in 2000 and subsequently fought for severance pay for the better part of two years, says about the women who constitute the union committee: "I am happy with the committee because they know our place, they are not aggressive and they talk politely. All the men who tried to join the committee resigned, because they were not reasonable, they did not listen. Women [explain the] reasons to the people" (personal interview, Bangkok, 24 January 2002).

[40] Personal interview Arunee Sirito, Bangkok, January 2002.

[41] Personal interview Wanpen Premkaew, Bangkok, 19 October 2001.

[42] WWUG annual meeting, Bangkok, 27 January 2002.

[43] Personal interview Wilaiwan Saetia, Bangkok (Omnoi-Omyai), 14 January 2002.

[44] The recent demand by the Thai Airways employees union for a policy against harassment of in-flight staff reveals the same line of reasoning but from the opposite direction. The female (then) president of the union advocated for the policy on grounds of air safety rather than women's rights, deeming the former to be more easily accepted by the company and the public at large in a cultural context, where women are expected to serve customers and to put up with difficult demands (personal interview Chamsri Sukchotiwattana, Bangkok, 21 January 2002). I would add that the company's efforts to portray its female flight attendants as beautiful, service-oriented, and obedient caregivers also makes it extremely difficult to raise sexual harassment as a workplace problem.

[45] Personal interview Wilaiwan Saetia, Bangkok, 14 January 2002.

[46] At the occasion of International Women's Day in 2003, the WWUG submitted six demands to the government, of which only one was unambiguously identifiable as a women's or gender issue: the establishment of an independent OSH institute; social security for unemployed workers at reasonable cost; extension of social security benefits to those in the informal economy; access to anti-retroviral medicine for workers with HIV/AIDS; the establishment of an Unemployment Insurance Fund for workers dismissed as a result of factory relocation to countries with cheaper labour costs; and development and promotion of meaningful participation by women workers at all levels of decision-making (Bundit 2004). The fact that the WWUG dropped child care centres from the list of demands might indicate sufficient progress by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in implementing a pilot project on child care centres in industrial areas.

[47] Personal interview Bundit Thonachaisetawut, Bangkok, 26 November 2001.

[48] Personal interview Arunee Sirito, Bangkok, 11 January 2002.

[49] Personal interview Arunee Sirito, Bangkok, 30 October 2001.

[50] Wanpen Premkaew during WWUG annual meeting, Bangkok, 27 January 2002.

[51] Suganta during WWUG annual meeting, Bangkok, 27 January 2002.

[52] Personal interview Arunee Sirito, Bangkok, 30 October 2001.

[53] As an interesting example of such bias, the 2004 Working Women of the Year award organised by a popular women's magazine was held in the ballroom of a five-star hotel, included a fashion show and big-name entertainment, and highlighted the successes of businesswomen and women in professional circles with higher education degrees. Among the latter were an aircraft engineer, a school headmistress, an assistant judge, and a legal consultant (*Bangkok Post* 7 September 2004). The article reporting on the event made no mention of blue-collar women workers.

[54] Telephone interview Sanitsuda Ekachai, Bangkok, 15 January 2002.

[55] Personal interview Dr. Chalidaporn Songsamphan, Bangkok, 30 April 2002.

[56] Personal interviews Suganta, Bangkok, 21 April 2003 and Arunee Sirito, Bangkok, 24 April 2003.

[57] Although relevant to a study of women workers mobilising in developing countries, this thesis does not explore in detail the role of NGOs in relation to labour activism by workers. For accounts of the power differentials between NGOs and workers and their consequences for organising strategies and activism, see for example Kumidini Rosa (1989) on Sri Lanka, Ford (2001) on Indonesia and Sally Theobald (1997) on Thailand. Theobald in particular cautions NGO activists to walk a tightrope between activism and sustainability of jobs.

[58] Some male union leaders, however, see informal workers as competition for organised and therefore more expensive labour. In some cases, this can provide an extra incentive for collaboration with this group of workers, though in other cases it becomes a justification for ignoring such workers and calling for an end to informal work.

[59] Personal interview Wilaiwan Saetia, Bangkok (Omnoi-Omyai), 14 January 2002.

[60] Personal interview Wilaiwan Saetia, Bangkok (Omnoi-Omyai), 14 January 2002.

Chapter 7 - Collective mobilisation of women workers in Indonesia

Introduction

The previous chapter suggested that Thai union women navigate precariously between affiliation and identification with the labour movement and an urge to address women's issues and thus mobilise women workers into alternative collective action. Although Thai union women recognised gender interests and saw these as intertwined with their workers' interests, they largely experienced gender as 'seriality' (Young 1995). In other words, they did not act collectively upon their gender identity and were more frequently motivated by an identity as workers or as women workers to undertake protests against employers, the government, or male trade union leaders. As women, they therefore appeared to claim proportional participation and representation in unions based on the similarity of their interests as workers and their contributions as workers rather than on any specific gender interests. This points to the importance of understanding local and global gender and economic regimes that combine to produce particular power relations. As such, these regimes force union women to formulate situational responses to suit particular audiences in their struggle to mobilise women and to increase women's participation and representation in public fora.

This chapter presents findings from Indonesia, with the aim of comparing the experience of union women in the two countries. While there are many similarities in economic and industrial development, the countries' countries' historical, political, cultural, and religious differences mean that women workers approach self-organisation and representation in very different ways, under different circumstances, and through different partnerships. Can the gender and industrial relations regimes in the two countries explain the differences in the ways in which Indonesian and Thai women workers build and manage their movements? This chapter will argue that many Indonesian union women tend to recognise and act upon gender interests that encompass both women's and workers' issues. Since Indonesian society often perceives women's needs and demands to be intrinsically different from men's, women workers have argued this requires greater participation and representation by

women in leadership and governance in a wide variety of institutions. This gives union women scope to frame their demands as both women's and workers' issues.

Similar to Chapter Six, this chapter starts by offering a brief background of the organisational context of women workers' organising in Indonesia and the women workers' organisations whose members were interviewed for this research. The chapter focuses on leaders and activists from the Forum of Women Leaders and Activists in the greater Jakarta area, but also gives examples from union women in Surabaya, Yogjakarta, Semarang (Unggaran), and Medan. The chapter continues to structure its discussion of union women's mobilising and organising around Tarrow's four properties of social movements. It closes with a discussion of the debate on quotas in politics and in trade unions, to highlight the significance of the New Order gender regime and its continuing influence on how union women contest and act upon collective identities.

Women workers' organising

Chapter Five noted how in recent years a new generation of women entered into mid-level management positions in progressive Indonesian trade unions such as FNPBI, SBSI, and several regional independent unions. While not large in number compared to the predominantly male leadership of then existing trade unions, this new cohort together with NGO activists took advantage of international support and pressure to argue for the establishment of women's departments and bureaux. As a result of their advocacy, between 1998 and 2002 almost all large trade union federations (SBSI, SPSI-Reformasi, FARKES, PAR, KPI etc) dedicated space (and in some cases a budget) for women's activities. Activists from these women' departments and bureaux also took advantage of this overseas support, the climate of political change in the late 1990s and the greater freedom for trade unions and political organisations, to establish in 2001 the Indonesian Forum of Women Leaders and Activists (hereafter called the Forum).

With assistance from the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS), the international arm of the AFL-CIO trade union federation in the United States, this Forum has evolved to become the main organisation by and for women workers in Indonesia. The group consists of over 200 women members, of whom some 30 meet regularly in Jakarta

and are engaged in training, education, and lobbying activities as well as public protests; the remainder live mostly in and around Jakarta, although the group is trying to expand its base beyond the capital, with associate members in Medan (North Sumatra), Semarang (Central Java), Yogjakarta, Solo (Central Java), and Surabaya (East Java). Although most members come from large national federations, several dozens come from the education and advocacy departments of smaller local unions. As evident from pamphlets and public speeches, the Forum sees its role as advocating for gender equality in trade unions and stimulating women's leadership. Its members state that their main activities concern training and education programmes for women union members, ranging from new members to heads of women's departments and officials in central union committees. The group also engages in advocacy, for example writing letters to relevant international organisations and Indonesian ministries, to promote policy change in the fields of labour and women's issues.

The results of an informal survey I carried out in 2003 confirmed that a clear majority of Forum members and sympathisers (those women workers who were invited to the conference but who were not yet officially members) have become active in trade unions since 1998.[1] This concentration of new activists is explained by the fact that many veteran union women are members of the SPSI or SPSI-Reformasi, which were not invited to join in the Forum due to their (perceived) conservative nature and collusion with the government. The largest proportion of Forum members comes from the textile, garment, and footwear sector, which is also the largest industrial sector in terms of women's employment in Indonesia. Many other members are from the pharmaceutical and health industry, the metal and electronics sector, and the service sector, with the remainder from the chemical, seafarers' and construction sectors. The absence from the Forum of the banking sector is discussed in more detail later in this chapter in relation to union women's alliances beyond sector and type of work.

My survey revealed that the majority of Forum members who are workers have higher vocational or technical education while several have specialised (post-high school) diplomas. Those who work as full-time union organisers more frequently are well-educated, middle-class women who have a university degree, and this at times sets them apart from the women workers in the Forum. The majority of Forum members are between 25 and 35 years old and not married; this may be because the obstacles faced by married

women are too great (hence few married women can be active in the Forum) or because the Forum members perhaps have less interest in marriage or have not found a suitable partner who will allow them to continue their activism after marriage.

Forum members occupy diverse positions in their trade unions. According to my survey, the largest proportion are shop stewards at the workplace level who work full-time but take on regular union tasks such as negotiating the collective bargaining agreement, handling cases and complaints, and sustaining the organisation at the factory or office level. A number of these shop stewards also hold positions in the central or provincial leadership committees of their federation, while a small proportion are full-time union workers at the central leadership level. Between 20 and 25 per cent of Forum members are regular trade union members without any leadership position. It is important to take note of the fact that a large number of Forum members are in workplaces where women constitute a majority, but where the trade union committee is dominated numerically by men. For most Forum members, the head of their enterprise union or federation is a man. It is in this context of male-dominated trade unions that the Forum has been carrying out its education and advocacy work since around 2000.

Aside from the above-mentioned informal survey and interviews with Forum members, this chapter also builds on writings by Indonesian women activists and NGOs and on interviews with union women in a network of regional trade union federations that is active throughout industrial centres in Indonesia. This Syndicate of the Indonesian Labour Movement was founded in 1998 and consists of Yasanti, a women workers' NGO in Yogjakarta, and regional federations or informal groupings located in Medan, the greater Jakarta area, Semarang, Surabaya, and Makassar. While it is not officially a women's organisation, the majority of its members and leaders are women.

One of its member organisations, the Independent Medan Trade Union (SMBI), was founded in 2001 through the merger of four local workers' groups and has some 2000 members in furniture, seafood, and plastics factories. The Regional Trade Union of Surabaya (SBR) was started in the mid-1990s and similarly was formalised after Indonesia's recognition of freedom of association in 1998. Both groups consist mostly of women workers, and leadership positions are dominated by women, according to my

interviewees. This is also the case in the Inter-Factory Learning Group (KPAP), an independent, self-funded, informal group in the Unggaran industrial area near Semarang, made up of a few dozen women from thirteen factories in the area (including several home-based workers), whose aim is to educate women workers about their right to organise. Members share a commitment to peace and labour solidarity, labour struggle, and gender equality. While not an official federation, the syndicate is an informal network that hopes in the future to become a progressive labour movement with activities throughout Indonesia. For now, the network concentrates on facilitating information sharing and attempts to streamline the approaches of each member.

What is unique about the Syndicate is its active commitment not only to labour struggle but to the overall democratisation and development of the country. Because of this goal, the Syndicate tries to overcome the divisions that have been created by decision-makers and rulers between workers and farmers, fishing folk, and students, and between white-collar and blue-collar workers. Most of its member organisations do not receive funding from any outside organisation, instead relying on membership dues and voluntary contributions from friends and local supporters. While this limits the reach of activities carried out by the member organisations, it also provides them with flexibility and independence in terms of deciding their priorities and strategies. As will become clear in this chapter, Syndicate member organisations have as a result of this independence and their local focus developed different approaches to women's mobilisation than the Jakarta-based Forum.

Mounting collective challenges

The previous chapter suggested that although shifts in the political environment (regarding systems, parties, and elites) could explain many aspects of a movement's emergence and decline, it did not adequately account for mobilising in political and economic circumstances considered adverse for collective action. The case of Indonesia shows the same argument in reverse: changes in political opportunities resulted in what could be considered opportune circumstances for social movements, yet in many localities and among many groups of workers large-scale mobilisation did not materialise. Thus, grievances, idealism, and a social movement's internal politics are additional factors to be considered in explaining members' motivation for contentious collective action.

Nevertheless, this section will show that political and economic circumstances can significantly influence the repertoires of contention that Indonesian union women employ in their collective struggles against the state and business interests.

Political opportunities

As previously noted, for almost three decades the New Order government did not allow independent organising outside the state-sanctioned trade union federation. In order to further its business interests, the government structured its industrial relations system after the national Pancasila state ideology. Employer-worker relations were portrayed as family relations and dispute settlement was aimed at consensus rather than allowing for open conflict (Ford 2001). As a result, workers became not only depoliticised at a personal level but also politically neutralised as a movement. It was in this context that Saptari (1995) noted that rural women workers in the cigarette industry in East Java were not interested in organising collectively through unions. Even where urban workers displayed increasing tendencies towards labour militancy, these tendencies could not be institutionalised through trade unions and thus were channeled into short-lived wildcat strikes (Hadiz 1997). After the fall of the New Order regime in 1998, however, the political and legal reforms and the rapid increase in the number of trade unions led many union activists to expect a surge in labour activism by both women and men. To what extent do these circumstances explain the emergence of the Forum for Women Leaders and Activists in 2001 and the Syndicate of the Indonesian Labour Movement in 1998?

If regarded from a legal and organisational perspective, the establishment of both these organisations owes much to the increasing freedom to establish workers' organisations after May 1998. Improved ability among workers to communicate with each other, labour NGOs, and overseas trade unions through the advent of free press and the Internet also contributed to the rise of new workers' groups. As well, the perceived success of student protests in ousting the New Order regime may have increased expectations among workers concerning the ability of civil society organisations to influence national and local politics, including on labour issues. Thus, the emergence of these two women workers' groups reflects in many ways workers' response to rapid changes in political, legal, and financial resources.

If, however, we look beyond the emergence of women workers into the union movement and consider the nature of their organisations, their expressions of discontent, and their general growth, changes in political opportunities appear to have less explanatory power. As will be shown later in this chapter, at least several women workers' organisations lack formal registration (either as trade unions or as charitable organisations). This could be due either to the particular types of organising preferred among women and resistance from male trade union leaders or to any perceived difficulties in registration and dangers of repression by employers and the state. Furthermore, the economic crisis is a major threat to workers' organising throughout Southeast Asia, because of the risk of job loss and the decreasing numbers of formal sector workers that have the potential to organise (Hadiz 2002). Leaders of the Forum and the Syndicate, however, revealed in interviews with me that this did not become a major obstacle to their efforts to expand and sustain membership. In this respect, the limitations of political opportunity structure in explaining the particular form and expression of women workers' protest become evident.

Repertoires of contention

An examination of the types of action in which Indonesian women workers engage must take into account the difference between contentious actions by workers (who are sometimes union members) in or near the workplace and action by union members, leaders, or activists in other locations. While strikes are a relatively new phenomenon for many Indonesian workers (Kammen 1997), the economic crisis in the late 1990s has seen their number decrease even further (by 20 per cent in 1998-2002 compared to the preceding five years according to Quinn [2003:50]). Yet, this still translates into an average of more than 200 strikes per year since 1998. The print media also frequently reports workers' involvement in street rallies or marches to local government offices where workers hope to meet with legislators or law enforcement officials to demand immediate intervention in labour disputes. Smyth and Grijns mention, furthermore, with regard to women workers, "the display of posters; singing and dancing; banging on doors or equipment; refusing to work; and sit-downs or sleep-ins at the offices of the local Department of Manpower" (1997:20).

Contentious action by workers is therefore diverse and changes with political and economic circumstances. Women workers throughout industrialised areas are no different from men in this respect, frequently joining and leading strikes and marches despite disapproval from family and friends and regardless of affiliation with a union. Union leaders and activists, in contrast, tend to have developed experience in a wider array of actions, as a result of their longer engagement in labour activism, their association and collaboration with NGOs, and their access to information and funding from overseas. Their repertoire of contention covers marches to government offices, actions to attract public attention, petitions demanding access to and negotiations with decision-makers, and performances of workers' theatre.

As in Thailand, the ideological leanings of advisors and sponsors at times leave a strong imprint on workers' organisations and their repertoires of contention. In the case of the Forum, its funding relationship with ACILS leads its members to focus on practical and feasible activities with mid-level activists and leaders, such as training on labour rights, negotiation, and lobbying. According to my interviews with ACILS programme officers, ACILS' preference for educational activities that gradually build the strength of the labour movement means that few Forum members advocate strikes, lock-outs, or other relatively far-reaching action.[2] ACILS funding appears to have made a significant difference, as it has allowed the Forum to focus more on long-term investments in training and education than most mainstream trade unions are able to do. Many mainstream trade unions that depend on dues – which are generally low as well as difficult to collect – have effectively been turned into service organisations: members only pay dues when they see results that make it worthwhile for them to pay, forcing union leadership to focus on 'bread and butter issues.' In contrast, the Forum has so far been free to pursue its own goals, without having to rely on membership dues or short-term achievements to sustain its membership. How the end of ACILS funding in late 2004 will influence the Forum remains to be seen.

Using this relative freedom, the Forum has engaged in popular education to discuss political economy issues such as the 2004 national and local elections, the country's international debt through IMF loans, and Indonesia's role in the global trade system. Participant observation showed that potential Forum members and supporters are approached not through participation in standard protest actions for Labour Day and International Women's Day, but rather through training and educational activities.

According to the Forum's annual reports, these cover topics such as organising workers, lobbying and advocacy vis-à-vis local government, negotiating with employers, and promoting electoral candidates who accommodate women workers' demands. Those same reports indicate that these educational activities have resulted in a clear increase in membership, mainly through the selection of younger and less experienced union women as participants. Hence, the Forum prioritises improving the skills of mid-level union women rather than mass mobilisation of industrial women workers into trade unions.

While financing difficulties play a role in limiting the type of activities union women are able to carry out, political and legal considerations also influence their repertoire of contention. Recognition of freedom of association in 1998 was followed by an increase in the number of trade unions and a shift from internal enterprise regulations to collective bargaining agreements between trade unions and employers (though the extent of genuine worker participation in these agreements is not always clear) (Quinn 2003:34). Most importantly, while workers were previously forced to carry out education efforts out of sight and in secret meeting places, they now can do so more or less openly and on a much larger scale. Thus, aside from funding limitations, the industrial relations system also influences the repertoires of contention available to women workers.

Collective challenge: Issues for mobilisation

Do Indonesian union women, like their Thai counterparts, mobilise largely around clusters of issues that are both women's and workers' issues? What can their demands tell us about the identities around which they mobilise? This section examines whether gender and workers' issues are equally important to motivate women workers to become active in unions.

Women workers in Indonesia who organise collectively generally reveal experiences far removed from those of the women workers interviewed by Hancock in rural West Java. The latter considered their work "fun, a relief from their tedious life in the villages, and a far better alternative to outside work" in the rice paddies (Hancock 2000:8). However, similar to the situation in Thailand, Indonesian union women recognise that many women workers, when faced with a case of injustice or an unsolved labour dispute in their

workplace, easily shed the above perception of factory work (if they ever had it) and are motivated to mobilise in groups. This view is shared by Tjandraningsih (1995:54; 2000:264-5) based on her research in factories in and around Bandung (West Java). But this raises the question, what kinds of cases provide adequate motivation for mobilisation into collective action? What meaning do women workers give to the instances of injustice they encounter?

As in Thailand, my interviews reveal that collective action in urban industrial Indonesia revolves around clusters of workers' and women-related issues but that the choice of issues depends on the audience. Women union leaders frequently protest against gender inequalities (such as their double burden and the family obligations that limit their union activities), but when they try to mobilise other women they strike a different chord. For example, Vera, an activist in the metalworkers' federation, raises topics as diverse as menstruation leave and the position of women in the federation during her monthly discussion groups for women workers in the electronics sector. This selection of topics is based on her belief that the class struggle waged by workers cannot be successful without also fighting simultaneously for gender equality. However, Vera blames opposition from the male leadership for her difficulties in trying to raise *within* the metalworkers' federation any issues that could be construed as women's issues. But when she approaches new or potential members, she focuses on problems that young women workers can easily relate to, such as wages and working hours.[3]

Similarly, Umi from the textile and garment federation asserts that the trade union movement in Yogjakarta even takes issues as difficult as intimidation and sexual harassment against women seriously as rallying points. In this sense, the movement is perhaps influenced by the post-New Order women's movement which has repeatedly emphasised violence against women as a vital area of struggle. But although Umi observes that most demands in her sector concern workers' welfare, allowances, and social security, she objects to these demands being called 'general' or 'gender-blind.' Instead, she cautions that "wages are also about discrimination, because especially women frequently earn below the minimum wage and are given a lower bonus."[4] In Semarang, two leaders of the Inter-Factory Learning Group (KPAP) blame union men for not acknowledging women's problems: "Male union leaders only talk about money, whereas women workers only talk

about getting rest!" In their eyes, clearly the unequal division of tasks in the household is to blame for this gap in perceptions of workers' needs and demands.[5]

As in Thailand, union women (and men) therefore agree that women's issues cannot easily be separated from workers' issues. Sulistri, head of the SBSI women's department and coordinator of the Forum, contends that women "tend to be active because they are workers, because the problems hit them in the workplace and those tend to be labour problems." However, they soon experience problems as women in the workplace, be it sexual harassment, unequal wages and benefits, differential tax rates, shortcomings in maternity leave provisions, or challenges posed by men in the workplace.[6] Parto, a male activist from SBI-Perjuangan observes that, "if [women workers] do not obey their boss, they are first of all blamed by their boss, but secondly also by the wider community; their problems must therefore be seen not only as those of workers but also those of women."[7] Similarly, in Semarang, members of the Inter-Factory Learning Group (KPAP) call attention not only to their status as contract workers and their low wages, but also to their low public profile as women.[8] They explicitly want to be treated equally to men, in the sense of not being subject to discrimination and societal prejudices about their capabilities and obligations.

How do these findings relate to previous research about the identities around which women workers mobilise? In her research during the 1980s on East Javanese women workers in the cigarette industry, Saptari found the dominant expressions of protest to be concerned with 'bread and butter' issues such as wages, bonuses, and production levels. This finding led her to conclude that unions and union women, to the extent they existed, did not raise gender issues such as sexual harassment, job discrimination, and a family wage for women (1995:218-20). Saptari notes that "even though consciousness may be about female identity, resistance is never really a protest against the denigration of this identity; it is more about survival and social justice" (1995:229). Her explanations for this phenomenon centre on the marginal but meaningful improvements in status and independence that factory work gives these women, the absence of stark contrasts between male and female opportunities and benefits, and the perpetuation of differentiation among women themselves.[9] Similarly, Smyth and Grijns note that "women's strategies as workers are a response not only to forms of labor control but also to gender-related domination" yet they conclude that "women's

resistance [in the Javanese context] is not directed against gender-related domination in the same way that poor peasants resist the rich and powerful" (1997:16). Thus, previous research points to the predominance of 'bread and butter' issues as the motivation for women workers' protest.

Whereas Saptari concluded that "resistance is about survival and social justice" and Smyth and Grijns asserted that resistance is not directed at gender oppression, my interviews show that some Indonesian women workers in a range of workplaces nowadays raise demands that can clearly be labeled as women's issues. For example, the achievements of the Inter-Factory Learning Group (KPAP) in Semarang show that when awareness raising takes locally identified priorities as its starting point, women workers are very interested in discussing gender issues and including them in their collective bargaining agreement. According to an activist from the Legal Aid Institute who provides technical assistance and advice to the KPAP, the key to attracting women workers to any collective organisation is to start from their individual experience *as women or men* in the workforce and the community. Organisers subsequently relate these individual experiences gradually to the larger environment of the district, the province, and the country in which they function. This enables group members to connect 'the personal' such as household and family issues to the gender division of labour nationally and globally.[10]

Since Saptari's and Smyth and Grijns' findings are based on research carried out during the New Order government and in particular locations, the findings reported here may very well reflect greater integration into global markets, regional differences, and a shift over time in consciousness and the perceived dangers of organising. The latter can be attributed to Reformasi, in particular to greater freedom of association and of speech and the re-emergence of independent women's organisations that use participatory teaching methods reminiscent of GERWANI, the progressive women's organisation of the 1950s and 1960s (Wieringa 2002).

Women workers elsewhere in Indonesia also act upon both their gender and workers' identity. For example, Ati, a plant-level activist in an electronics factory in East Jakarta, and her female union colleagues state that it is important to identify themselves as workers with common experiences. Ati, however, says it is equally important to identify as women,

but they must seek to be a *new* type of woman who is not oppressed by men either at home or in the workplace. This involves shedding traditional Javanese (and widespread) gender roles of obedience, shyness, and acceptance of hierarchy, because these roles are the direct opposite of what is expected of union members. Ati is certainly not shy or obedient towards either her male colleagues or her managers, and has established an informal women's group within the factory's union in order to mobilise other women to raise women's issues.[11]

This acting upon both gender and workers' identity is thus evident among women union leaders and activists, as it sustains their activism, forges unity amongst them, and shapes their internal struggles within their organisations. As in Thailand, such an articulation of class and gender is less directly evident in the strategies used by union women to mobilise other women. At this level, 'bread and butter' issues predominate in the discussions organised at the enterprise level, although groups like the KPAP in Semarang consciously employ participatory adult learning techniques that use personal experiences as their starting point. Discussion and awareness-raising activities by the KPAP and the Forum frequently result in a broader definition of women workers' issues beyond practical gender interests.

In conclusion, while Saptari concluded that women workers in the 1980s continued to fit their issues into the space allowed to them by the state, the union women quoted above act upon their gender and workers' identity. Some of them also encourage ordinary women workers to look beyond practical gender interests. By raising issues such as violence against women in the workplace and in the family, they challenge dominant gender notions of obedience and of the family and household as personal domains. It is precisely to represent women and to defend their practical and strategic gender interests that ordinary women workers are encouraged to join trade unions or women workers' groups. Union women, however, realise the need to adjust their mobilising strategies to fit with the immediate priorities of these women, if they are to build feelings of common purpose and solidarity.

Building common purpose

As noted in Chapter Two, the removal of obstacles to collective action does not automatically guarantee that women will join trade unions (Lawrence 1994). In the context of Indonesia, the traditional Marxist expectation of collective action arising out of commonality of work experiences or position in relations of production runs into trouble with regard to women workers. Amongst the reasons pointed out in Chapters Three and Four are history particularities (suppression of leftist movements and independent trade unionism), culture (acceptance of hierarchy), industrial relations (obstacles to unionisation), labour control (deliberate differentiation among women workers), and economic development (relatively recent entry into formal work). Even where women workers have common experiences as workers which can provide them with "certain dispositions", this is not sufficient to assume the emergence of collective action or to "dictate the types of action that come into practice" (Saptari 1995:201). Even if individual women realise that they cannot solve a workplace problem on their own, there is still a wide gap between asking a friend for help and forming a collective entity to tackle the issue at hand. Thus, in order to make the most of workers' feelings of discontent, union organisers must construct feelings of group cohesion, solidarity, and common purpose.

As Chapter Six showed with respect to Thailand, such group cohesion generally does not arise without the active involvement of leaders who can channel emotions into productive inputs and support, and who can encourage feelings of common identification. Such involvement is similarly observed among feminist and many other organisations. Whereas the case of Thailand highlighted emotional engagements and the construction and definition of the group as two means to build feelings of common purpose, this section concentrates on the efforts of union women to reintroduce the concept of collective action for political purposes. Whereas Indonesian women union leaders and activists show a relatively high level of political awareness, their mobilisation efforts towards women workers require awareness raising and education about the potential of collective movement before emotional engagements can be put to use for any movement. This difference between the two countries results from Indonesia's history of repression of independent political organisations during the New Order regime: while leaders and activists might have been encouraged by the recent political changes, most workers remain relatively unaware of the

possibilities or fearful of reprisals. The section continues by describing the efforts at group construction and recognition, which – while similar to those noted in Thailand – take on a more culturally influenced character.

Reintroducing collective movement

Collective mobilising by trade unions generally reflects a strongly held belief in the ability to change one's (immediate) environment through large-scale activism. Yet in New Order Indonesia, collective organising was for decades subject to government control through strict rules of hierarchy and limitations on activities independent of state-sanctioned organisations. Thus, NGOs and trade unions are currently faced with the challenge of (re-)introducing workers (and society in general) to the possibility and the potential benefits of collective action. In many cases, this requires explicit political education about past government efforts at suppression of the labour movement and about the role of workers in the global capitalist economy.

Indonesian women face the additional difficulty that experience in organising women collectively comes mainly from the field of social welfare, due to the destruction of independent women's organisations such as GERWANI after the 1965 transfer of power (Wieringa 2002). Social welfare organisations at the local and national level (such as those noted in Chapter Five) were carefully controlled by the government. They were used to define women as domestic and to channel women's initiatives and their drive to organise towards socially acceptable goals such as family planning, social welfare, and children's education (Sunindyo 1996; Suryakusuma 1996).[12] Furthermore, as Ida Budiarti from the Indonesian Women's Coalition in Semarang relates, "women have never been encouraged to think, so we need a long time to make them aware of their needs beyond saving through an *arisan* [rotating communal savings fund] and earning money."[13] This in fact applies not just to women but also to many other sections of the population whom the government discouraged from becoming politically active or politically educated. Finally, since women are often responsible for management of household income (and for the entire well-being of the family), it is not surprising that many are reluctant to risk their livelihood to engage in collective action with uncertain outcomes. For many women, therefore, politicised civil society organisations are either unknown or regarded with distrust.

The emergence among women workers of consciousness and knowledge about labour activism often requires deliberate efforts by activists to build a common purpose among potential movement members. Activists must demonstrate an understanding of the life experiences of women workers and of the meanings they give to these experiences. One group that has been particularly successful at drawing together women workers through feelings of common purpose is the Inter-Factory Learning Group (KPAP) in Semarang.

Dian and Ria, two of the group's leaders, recount that they have had to win the trust of each worker who joined the group by first helping her overcome obstacles related to her role in the family and household. This usually involves convincing a worker's husband of the benefits of group membership, followed by a period of responding to the individual needs and demands of prospective members. In one case this involved nursing a female worker without family back to health after an accident, and in another it required the KPAP to take action against domestic violence. "We have a very personal approach," they say. "We ask new members to talk about their personal issues, and we introduce ourselves fully to these new members ... At first it is a bit strange but then it gets easier, when the women understand their own position as women in the factory."[14] Now all members are said "to have a strong will to learn" from each other. Such strategies are reminiscent of the grass-roots organising carried out by GERWANI, the progressive women's organisation affiliated to the communist party in the 1950s and 1960s (Wieringa 2002) and perhaps of the feminist principle that "the personal is political."

What do KPAP members expect to gain from unionisation or self-organisation? According to Dian and Ria, the main answer is to increase their knowledge in order to help themselves. Through discussion groups, KPAP members come to realise that they have few career opportunities and face multiple tasks at home, and they are keen to learn more about the causes of their common situation. For example, they learn that women are not considered for positions involving management or supervision in their factories because managers consider women "unable to control other women."[15] But the essence of this learning process is that women conclude that they themselves are not to blame for their inferior status in the workforce and at home, and that they can change their situation through collective action. Through the ability to connect the personal with wider political

patterns at all levels, women workers are empowered to have a more positive concept of self and to view their position in the family, workplace, and society as inter-related.[16]

This example of the KPAP shows women union leaders providing incentives and taking women's experiences in daily life as their starting point, because they sense opposition among women workers to the concept of collective action. The other regional groups in the Syndicate of the Indonesian Labour Movement, and various NGOs throughout Indonesia, follow a similar approach of explaining and demonstrating the inter-relatedness of personal circumstances with political and economic developments. Through the process of discussing and solving small personal issues, women workers learn to recognise their common interests as women and as workers, and to translate this into a common purpose for their movement.[17]

Had these leaders raised economic interests such as minimum wages or working hours from the start, they might not have succeeded in mobilising women workers because of a lack of mutual trust among the community (especially towards outsiders). Instead, Dian and Ria fostered feelings of common purpose by locating the source of these workers' problems in their identity as workers and as women. These identities are experienced not only directly in the household, community, and workplace through the division of labour based on gender, age, and economic capacity, but also as they are imposed by others through stereotypes and misconceptions.[18] In such a context, women workers' groups can function as safe places where they learn to formulate common goals and strategies for collective action both as women and as workers. Thus, the process of building a common purpose among women workers not only must be grounded in historical, political, and economic contexts, but also must respond to the gender and economic needs of potential participants, and in particular their circumstances *as women or men* in their household and larger community.

Group construction and recognition

Part of the creation of a common purpose is the development of a shared definition and a common vision of 'who we are.' Some sociological approaches to social movements hold that membership in a social group will be more meaningful than membership in a social

category. For example, Stryker argues that "people do not live in categories, they live in groups" where their relationships are based on task interdependence rather than "interdependence of fate based on shared characteristics" (2000:5). From a feminist perspective, Young (1995) has argued for a distinction between passive 'seriality' in a social collective and group membership with an internalised identity expressed through solidarity. With respect to Thailand, it has been argued that, because of a gender regime that comparatively speaking "signifies in conjunction with [...] asexual power differentials" (Van Esterik 1999:280), many women workers will see womanhood as a category or collective in which membership is not chosen and which does not reflect personal commitments. Since Thai society promotes feelings of a shared destiny as workers, women workers therefore less often claim recognition as women based on gender difference than as workers based on class difference. In Indonesia, however, we find clear signals of 'interdependence of fate' between women, meaning that gender is a relatively important signifier in the lives of women workers, resulting in claims of gender difference.

Consistent with Saptari's (1995) finding that women workers are conscious of their female identity, most contemporary union women in Indonesia (even those with little exposure to gender issues) in my interviews with them readily identified themselves as first and foremost women rather than as workers. This is at least partially related to women's more recent entry into large-scale manufacturing employment compared to Thailand and to official discourses sanctioning women's activities as women workers or TKW (Tenaga Kerja Wanita).[19] Where women have entered into paid employment outside the household (and country) only during the past one or two decades, as is generally the case among rural migrants in industrial areas around large cities, their self-identification as workers is likely to be relatively weak. Furthermore, similar to the case of Thailand, identification as worker or labourer generally carries negative overtones of coarseness and lack of sophistication which many women workers want to escape (as evident in the Indonesian term for blue-collar worker, *buruh kasar*, which literally means 'rough worker') (see Chapter Three).

A more important explanation for the difference between Thailand and Indonesia is that women workers interviewed for this research in Indonesia frequently refer to a shared destiny among women, based on the God-given (defined) nature or role (*kodrat*) and a similar internal spirit (*nyawa*) shared by all women. Rather than based on common

oppression and discrimination, instead the New Order normative ideology of *ibuism* defined women first and foremost as mothers and caretakers of the household and used the concept of *kodrat* as a justification (Robinson 1997, 2000). Sofiati from the Indonesian Wood Workers Union Federation illustrates the persistent impact of this discourse when in my interview she says that *as a woman* she has to protest the treatment of overseas migrant women workers by recruitment and sending agencies and the lack of action by the Indonesian government to protect these women.[20] Although their educational background differs significantly from that of Sofiati, Vera and Haryati, officers of the Central Committee of the Metalworkers' Federation (SPMI) voice similar beliefs. They state that, although their priorities and interests could differ, women workers would know and recognise their common interest with other women, based on their common spirit (*nyawa*).[21] This suggests that women union leaders and activists feel some degree of closeness with other women beyond sympathy or pity.

Commentators have linked the existence and wide circulation in Indonesia of a '*kodrat wanita*' (women's role defined by God's will) to perceptions in patriarchal cultures in Indonesia of a common fate shared by all women and to New Order discourse of common womanhood (Tiwon 1996; Robinson 1997). This common fate usually refers to a woman's destiny to become a wife and mother (or her duty to fulfill this obligation to her parents or to society), and her 'natural' task to raise children and run the household. Meanwhile, her husband would ensure the financial aspects of household management (in theory at least). As noted before, in reality women's roles and responsibilities are beset by contradictions. Nevertheless, this ideology has perhaps encouraged many Indonesian women to consider the category 'women' as more than passive 'seriality.' Instead, womanhood approaches the status of a group and therefore encourages feelings of collective self-identification as women.

A practical example of women workers acting on their self-identification as women is found in perceptions surrounding menstruation and menstruation leave. Indonesia is one of the few Asian countries (not including Thailand) where women workers by law are entitled to two days rest during their menstruation.[22] During the revision of the labour law that resulted in a new law being passed in February 2003 (Law 13/2003), the Indonesian government appeared ready to give in to pressure from the business community to

withdraw this right, which according to employers resulted in excessively high labour costs. Union women protested vociferously against these plans, basing their arguments not only on the need for rest for factory workers who lack hygienic facilities in their workplaces and adequate nutrition to fight anaemia.[23]

What was also important was union women's strong opinion that women from all economic sectors should be allowed to let their reproductive 'instruments' (*alat*) rest for two days, whether or not these women actually felt ill. According to my interviews, this discourse extends to those experienced union women whose view of women's *kodrat* differs from the official discourse in that it encompasses only women's reproductive functions (i.e. menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, and breastfeeding). The findings of my survey among Forum members also reflect this discourse: a large majority of respondents thought of menstruation leave as a right that must be used, in other words not only taken when ill. Thus, because of the physical *and* the cultural construction of womanhood, large numbers of women both in manufacturing jobs and in pink-collar and white-collar office jobs felt that they had a common nature as women, which required protection through legislation.

In conclusion, Indonesian women workers are generally likely to act upon their self-identification as women and to engage in collective action with other women because of strong recognition that they share a common nature and purpose as women. Unlike in Thailand, where women workers perceive of their gender identity mostly as 'seriality' that is experienced passively, Indonesian women workers' groups actively incorporate such feelings of self-identification as women to make claims for recognition as women and to mobilise women workers. Such feelings among their members are culturally inspired rather than organisationally constructed. Thus, the Indonesian case demonstrates the importance of gender and gender identity when considering how group members build a common purpose.

Building solidarity at grassroots level

Do strong feelings of common self-identification among women translate into successful mobilising efforts among union women? Although we know that women workers at times act militantly in their planned and spontaneous protests, little of the research done on

Indonesian women workers and their resistance against exploitation speaks about the strength and sources of women workers' solidarity. Yet, solidarity is an important ingredient in the formation of sustained contentious action and the social movements that can flow from such action. On the one hand, Tjandraningsih found with reference to women workers in West Javanese factories that "[the] feeling of unity and solidarity [is] of a short-term nature and usually dissolves when workers' demands are met" (2000:265). On the other hand, the relative success of the Forum and regional trade unions in attracting women to their campaigns and activities seems to indicate women workers' considerable interest in mobilising collectively over longer periods of time. This section shows how women workers' groups in Indonesia have made efforts to build solidarity among women workers by framing issues so that they resonate with prospective movement members and by building consensus among members regarding the group's interests and the meanings attached to these interests. Both strategies indicate that union women simultaneously reproduce and challenge gender and workers' identities in the process of building solidarity.

Framing

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, collective organisation involves careful framing of the issue or goal around which movement members mobilise. For union women, such framing of their issues is an important means to show members the common concerns they have as women and as workers. What issues motivate women workers to undertake collective action, and how do union women frame them?

Saptari (1995) argues that during the late 1980s and early 1990s women's issues were never able to garner sufficient attention from the media and public in general. Particular women's issues such as sexual harassment, if raised publicly at all, were "never very strongly grounded in the daily protest of workers or the demands that were raised in public discussion on the plights of the workers" (1995:57). She concludes from this that "at the national level discussions concerning the specific problems faced by women workers have become marginalised by the broader issue of workers' exploitation" (1995:57). She gives the example of the Marsinah murder in 1993 which generated a large public outcry regarding military involvement in the case, rather than regarding the gender-specific

aspects. This leads her to conclude that NGOs and activists in Indonesia have made gender issues subordinate to general labour concerns.

According to women who were labour activists at the time, however, the gender dimension of the Marsinah case was not as easily forgotten as Saptari assumes. Instead, the portrayal of the case in local media and among activists was subject to protracted struggles in which feminist activists attempted to give a different meaning to the case than the general image of a political murder that was put forward by activists from politically oriented labour and legal NGOs and trade unions.[24] According to my interviews, it was not women's fear of weakening the fledgling movement by raising divisive women's issues (as Saptari suggests), but rather an inability and unwillingness on the part of male leaders of the labour movement to grasp the gender-dimensions of Marsinah's case that led the movement to focus on political violence and the role played by the military.

Nori Andriyani, formerly active with Yayasan Perempuan Mardhika, an NGO working with women workers in Jakarta and East Java, states that the women workers in her discussion groups were aware that women union leaders were especially vulnerable to violence because they transgressed gender norms. She reminded me that Marsinah was raped by security forces: "Women are attacked as women, it's a form of punishment because women workers were supposed to be docile, this was a message that they should shut up."[25] But although Nori and her fellow NGO workers could clearly identify this gender angle, they did not "strongly emphasise it, because we thought [more] about the workers' issue, because Marxist ideology was very much alive at the time." In the end, the Marsinah case was framed as an issue of state violence and interference in labour dispute settlement, rather than as a gender issue. Ford also found the gender-impact of the case to be significant:

> The link between female labour activism and Marsinah's murder, whilst reinforcing the image of 'factory daughter as victim', fed also into a much more positive discourse amongst politically-aware workers and labour activists in which the 'factory daughter' became also 'empowered activist'. Marsinah's death became a cause celebre, and challenged the widely held perception that women workers were all docile, biddable and obedient. Furthermore, it raised awareness that, while organised labour opposition remained predominantly male, there were many female worker activists in Indonesia (Ford 2003:90).

Thus, although the 'class versus gender' debate that Saptari alludes to does exist, it appears to be alive only at a rather abstract level among NGO activists. What was and still is at stake for union women (outside NGOs) is rather a feminist struggle to put women's issues on the agenda of the Indonesian labour movement. Ten years on, my interviews with young union women reveal that they still strongly identify with Marsinah whom they believe was killed because she was both a woman and an activist. Because of the risks of gender-specific violence, the Marsinah case is yet another reminder for them of their gender identity.

The above examples of demands for menstruation leave and of the framing of issues such as the Marsinah murder case suggest that gender identity is an important component of mobilisation efforts among women workers in Indonesia. On a practical level, framing of women workers' demands must take as its starting point their own experience of problems, often leading union women to start their awareness-raising efforts with reference to economic issues of immediate concern. For sustainable mobilisation into collective action, however, it does not take long for gender issues to arise, both in terms of their actual workplace experiences and in mobilisation efforts such as described above. While solidarity does not arise automatically among women workers any more or less than it does among men, the union women I interviewed are well aware that feelings of common womanhood provide a potential basis for building solidarity.

On a conceptual level, my interviews demonstrate that Marsinah's case did not so much highlight the contradictions between activism on the basis of class or gender but rather called attention to the gender aspects of her case. Contrary to Saptari's findings, many women activists at the level of union leadership or in NGOs appear to have been well aware of the importance of the case for women workers. They have subsequently tried to utilise it to build solidarity among (and support for) women factory workers. Thus, the Marsinah case highlights the patriarchal resistance from mainstream trade unions rather than an abstract 'class versus gender' struggle. This indicates that for many union women, gender identity is a subtle yet crucial aspect of efforts to build solidarity.

Consensus mobilisation through identities

Notwithstanding this discourse of common womanhood and common fate, my interviews suggest that essentialist notions of women's qualities do not figure strongly in Indonesian women workers' claims for recognition. The union women interviewed for this research, like their counterparts in the women's movement, appear careful not to reify widespread cultural and religious notions of women as incapable and irrational. Unlike in Thailand, they usually do not consider women as better and more effective leaders than men. For example, Umi believes that while some women work harder, are more thorough, and are more courageous in their union activities than men, this is not the case among all women but depends on individual character.[26] Similarly, Arum from the Women's and Children's Bureau of SPSI-Reformasi believes that women and men have the same ability, but Indonesian culture directs women to the domestic sector, which makes them more frank and open in expressing their opinions. She believes that women have to work harder to prove themselves, which makes those who succeed appear superior to men.[27] Thus, whereas Thai women union activists try to build solidarity by encouraging women to contribute their distinct skills to the union movement, the Indonesian union women I interviewed appear to take a different approach.

Compared with the WWUG in Thailand, members of both the Forum and regional trade unions in Indonesia voice much less uncertainty concerning the character and objective of their collective action and their organisations. They considered their goal to be both to assist and empower women workers and to promote gender equality in trade unions. But they recognise that many women workers find it difficult to change their position in the household and family, or may derive some satisfaction from their traditional roles and responsibilities as women (which also encompass a strong economic dimension). This recognition requires union women to navigate carefully between contesting and accommodating hegemonic gender identities in their mobilisation efforts. Educational activities for prospective women union members therefore speak about both a common womanhood based on needs, responsibilities, and characteristics different from men, and a newly constructed identity as union member who defends women workers' interests and rights.

Such attempts to integrate hegemonic and counter-hegemonic identities can result in contradictions for the women workers in question but respond to the diversity among women workers. Consider, for example, the responses from women workers in Ati's electronics factory in East Jakarta, who were asked during a women-only gender awareness-raising workshop to describe in a drawing what type of woman they wanted to become. Approximately half of the thirty-five participants drew a woman wearing the Islamic headscarf and full-length clothing, often with children by the side. Their explanatory comments mentioned their desire to be a role-model for their children, a good wife or "successful homemaker" loved by their husbands, as well as a good Muslim with a clean conscience. However, only a few of these participants indicated a desire to stop working after marriage.

In a further display of contrast, the other half of the participants had dreams of pursuing a career as a policewoman, accountant, or journalist, or of becoming "a useful woman for the nation."[28] What all of these women had in common were their employer (a medium-sized plastic manufacturing company with 80 per cent female workforce) and their voluntary attendance at this union workshop. By the end of 2003, these women had fought for and obtained paid menstruation and maternity leave, family allowance for both male and female workers, and discontinuation of the use of six-month contracts beyond the legal limit (a complaint heard particularly frequently among female staff).[29] These achievements show that women workers felt sufficiently motivated by the enterprise union's respect for their varying roles and needs to engage in collective action.

The amalgamation of traditional and new gender and worker identities may have grown out of the potential for mobilising Indonesian women based on their gender roles and interests as mothers and wives. The relative success of this strategy was clearly shown during the 1998 uprising against the Suharto government, when a group of women (who were journalists, activists and academics) established Suara Ibu Peduli (Voice of Concerned Mothers or SIP). This organisation began to sell affordable baby milk, considered a basic need for most families, and held its first peaceful demonstration on 23 February 1998 (Budianta 2002; Bianpoen 2000a). Because their traditional role as mothers was threatened, SIP quickly attracted thousands of ordinary women who had never engaged in public

protest but who were willing to join women in similar circumstances. More than six years on, the group still counts hundreds of lower middle-class women in Jakarta as its members.

How this kind of collective action utilising traditional roles should be regarded is a matter of diverse interpretation, with some likely to criticise the reification of traditional gender stereotypes and others praising the mothers for taking public action when their voices needed to be heard. In a more nuanced assessment, Bianpoen (2000a) believes that the women who initiated SIP consciously used motherhood as a cover for their political activities, though she implies that the group's long-term support emanated from housewives, a majority of whom presumably acted on the basis of their traditional identity rather than to a call for greater democracy (though the two are of course not incompatible). But she maintains that "while SIP persisted in the mother's role, they also continued to support political aspirations, playing a key role in the supply of survival food for the students who protested at the Parliament building, pursuing the fall of Soeharto" (2000a:287).

Similarly, Budianta (2002) and Robinson (2002) see SIP's strategic use of motherhood as an attack on the "familist ideology of the New Order" (Robinson 2002:146). Robinson argues that "while state practices intensify women's association with mothering, in a counter-hegemonic move women's activism on the basis of motherhood makes use of this available political space" (2002:145). Thus, SIP successfully mobilised women based on practical gender interests that for some became a symbol for strategic gender interests such as political participation and protest against the New Order hierarchy.[30]

Similarly, women's activist Nori Andriyani considers this strategy of using traditional roles to be intrinsically political. If confronted with criticism that it does not change women's position in society, she retorts that "the strategy needs to be seen in the light of the difficulty to change things in Indonesia, and as long as at the local level it matters, it can be meaningful."[31] When asked if Indonesian women can be seen as a clear interest group, Nori answers, "Yes, because they have particular interests that need to be fought for at different levels." Her statement is backed by the results of a 2003 Asia Foundation survey of the Indonesian electorate, which found that 61 per cent of male and 59 per cent of female respondents viewed women as a group with "common needs ... that should be expressed in

politics and elections" (Asia Foundation 2003:134). Thus, women appear to consider themselves "a reasonable social category expressing a certain kind of social unity" (Young 1995:114) which can lead them to group "self-consciously as women and on the basis of their gendered condition" (122).

If Indonesian women define themselves by a common identity as women and struggle for recognition as a group, does this also apply for women workers and union women? My interviews with union women strongly suggest that many union women in their struggles at times define themselves as women and other times as workers. A common theme in these interviews is the inability of union men to relate to women's needs and interests. Consequently, many union women speak about the need to represent women workers' common needs and interests that are articulated through their collective action. Such thinking is exemplified by Yuni from the finance sector in Jakarta and head of the ASPEK women's committee, who when asked if women's interests can be represented by men responds with the following example:

> At the micro level of the union, men do not want to think about maternity leave ... once in a workshop when a woman suggested asking permission for her husband to take child care leave, all the male participants laughed at her. Men are also opposed to the extension of time to breastfeed from four to six months ... in fact they believe that four months is already too long. If this way of thinking occurs at the union level, then what can we expect at the level of politics?[32]

Sofiati, head of the Indonesian woodworkers' federation complains:

> [Men until now] have neglected to mention women's reproductive God-given role (*kodrat*) and have portrayed women's demands as exaggerations ... Men cannot know women's interests because they cannot feel them.[33]

According to Umi from Yogjakarta, the garment and textile sector tries to organise women workers by telling them that:

> If women do not participate their needs will not be known. Women themselves know their needs ... Women's welfare will also increase if they participate, not only the welfare of men.[34]

Ester from the Seafarers' Union similarly considers union men's reluctance to fight on behalf of women workers an incentive for women workers to act on their gender identity. In

her response to my question about men representing women's interests, she strategically (but indirectly) employs discourse about common womanhood (*kodrat*) to argue for women's collective action:

> If women do not want to defend their fate ('*nasib*'), then how can the union help? Women have to defend their rights and do this through getting together, not men ... it is not possible to have men defend women's interest ... When discrimination against women happens, the action must come from women. Men are welcome to help but women must be given the opportunity [to take action]. Perhaps elsewhere it's possible [for men to defend women's interests] but not in Indonesia![35]

These statements suggest that union women in Indonesia see the neglect of women's interests by union men as an additional reason to mobilise and organise as women. They make strategic use of hegemonic gender identity for mobilising purposes when they refer to women's inherently common nature and common interests based on their *kodrat*. However, they also articulate the need to fight for gender interests that may go against the interests of their husbands and male union colleagues. This requires union women to represent their own demands and fight for their own rights as women workers.

Yet, this balancing of two different identities reveals some disagreements over women workers' rights and needs in a globalising economy and a changing society. For example, in my interview with Sulistri (female) and Firman (male) of the SBSI's women's department, a heated discussion arose concerning the potential need for protection of women workers and their exclusion from particular types of workplaces. Sulistri recognises the difficulties in determining how much protection and special treatment women require. For example, night work for women is frequently not a free choice but something imposed by employers or through economic necessity. Sulistri therefore advocates special protection measures so that women do not suffer from the burden of night work.[36] On the other hand, Firman takes a more liberal attitude, believing that the decision whether or not to take up this work should depend on the individual capacity and will of each woman, providing that it is safe work. Sulistri in response protests that women would still have to (or want to!) do the household chores and take care of their children during the day, instead of getting sleep like male workers would be able to without questioning.[37]

This discussion on night work encapsulates the difficulties facing the Indonesian women workers' movement. Claims by Forum members for special treatment, in the form of a quota in unions for representation of their distinct gender interests, frequently run counter to the simultaneous expectation by many union men and women that women should be treated equally to men, in the name of gender equality and common interests as workers. By emphasising women workers' common womanhood, union women may be able to activate their gender identity for collective action. Yet, they also run the risk that sexual difference becomes overemphasised by their male union colleagues. As Amin, executive director of Yasanti (an NGO dealing with women workers in Yogjakarta, Central Java) observes, many unions have women's divisions but these are seen as separate entities: "it's not about gender but only about women's issues."[38]

However, in a context where women workers still have to fight for the right to participate in trade union affairs and to get a slice of the budget, perhaps conflation of gender issues with women's issues is not such a bad thing in the short run. At the very least, it may call attention to women workers' practical gender interests. Nevertheless, such a focus on practical gender interests may pose future problems: even if the number of women in decision-making positions starts to increase significantly, these women may continue to be excluded from decision-making on 'hard' issues such as budgets, policies, and strategies regarding economic and political development. Since this discussion mirrors the discussion in Indonesia in 2002-2004 concerning the quota for women in politics, it is worthwhile reflecting in the next section on the implications and the lessons to be learned by union women from this policy initiative.

Sustaining the movement

Women workers may launch a carefully worded, large-scale protest against injustice, be recognised as a collective and be united in their determination, but will their movement outlive the cause that triggered it? Oppositional movements are often co-opted by governments, pacified with promises, or die a quiet death after their demands have been met or their issues defeated or forgotten (Tarrow 1998). This section considers the fourth of Tarrow's properties of social movements: how collective movements can sustain their challenge. This is of particular importance, since – compared to Thailand – the Indonesian

women workers' groups are of more recent origin and have not yet achieved prominence or significant results that could motivate other women to join the existing organisations. As in Thailand, two factors crucial to a movement's sustainability are its organisational structure and its ability to form networks and work through coalitions. In both cases, gender identity and worker identity play important roles in explaining the path taken by these women workers and their groups. The Indonesian case differs from Thailand in that discussions about sustainability touch on quotas and separate structures for women workers and Indonesian women generally emphasise the need for women's representation based on their reclaiming of gender identity.

A quota system for women in politics?

If women have distinct gender needs and interests, then women's participation in politics is required. Should women be able to represent their needs and interests in public through a system of quota? In Indonesia, these questions have taken on special significance among women workers since the start around 2000 of public discussions about a women's quota in politics and especially since the passing in February 2003 of legislation establishing a voluntary 30 per cent quota for women in political party candidacy lists.[39]

Some women workers disagree with the quota for women in politics. Those who doubt the efficacy of a quota in political parties say it detracts attention away from the quality of the candidates. Yanti from ABGTeks, for example, points out that, although she supports the quota, it does not guarantee the entry of different women into politics, in other words, poor 'working class' women who would not otherwise be able to enter formal politics. Because she is aware of class differences between women, Yanti questions what women parliamentarians have been able to accomplish so far for Indonesian women, but hopes that the quota will be a useful means to ensure gender-sensitive legislation.[40] Vera from the Metal Workers' Federation similarly wants to see more women workers participating in politics, rather than women from the "upper classes."[41] Yuni from the banking sector, on the other hand, is pessimistic because she believes it will be difficult to attract qualified women.[42] She is also "not convinced that women can make a difference simply by being women."[43] In short, many women workers are not opposed in principle to a quota but rather doubt its efficacy, implementation, and intended consequences.

Yet, many union women perceive that women can and should claim their gender interests as a justification for their presence and participation in decision-making bodies. They agree at least in part with the quota because they believe that women are a political interest group who should represent their own gender and worker interests. The urgency of women representing their own interests, be they physical or conceptual, is a common theme among contemporary Indonesian women activists. TV star Nurul Arifin, who in mid-2003 announced her (failed) candidacy for the 2004 parliamentary elections, justified her entry into politics, and the 30 per cent quota, with the following words:

> My body is owned by my body, and my spirit is a part of my body. I myself know best what my needs are. I myself know best what my desires are. Because of this, it is women who can decide about the needs and interests of women. Appoint a minimum of thirty per cent women as policy-makers. (In CETRO women and elections brochure, 2003).

The different arguments in favour of the 30 per cent quota recounted in the media and in my interviews mirror those mentioned by Phillips (1995). Although it is perhaps the easiest to employ, the economic or demographic argument of women constituting 50 per cent of the population is not often heard. Instrumentalism is more common in certain official circles. The United Nations Development Programme in Indonesia, for example, in its public presentation of research on the role of women in politics referred to the importance of women's participation and gender equality as a contribution towards good governance. The UNDP representative justified the organisation's attention to women in politics by quoting World Bank research findings that a rise in the number of women in parliament would result in a reduction of corruption (*Kompas* 10 March 2003). One female parliamentarian argued that, "with an increase in the number of women representatives as decision-makers at the legislative level, there will be a good result for improvement of living standards of the nation in general" (Aisyah Amini in *Kompas* 28 April 2003:39). Another one stated that since few voters believed that caring about women's issues was an important requirement for a leader, women candidates should focus on how they could improve the economic, political, and security situation of the country (Noviantika Nasution in *Kompas* 28 April 2003:37).

While such pragmatic and instrumentalist arguments are perhaps important for international organisations and seasoned Indonesian politicians seeking re-election, many Indonesian women activists state a very different motivation, focusing more often on women's different gender needs and interests and their different capabilities. For example, in my interview with her, Masruchah (since January 2004 secretary-general of the Indonesian Women's Coalition, a large women's organisation with chapters throughout the country) bases her approval of the quota on her observation that men do not voice the needs of women: "only if women participate can women's needs be known." She believes that trade unions welcome the quota for women in political parties, "because they expect more just policies about workers from women candidates."[44]

Ida Budiarti, head of the Indonesian Women's Coalition in Semarang similarly argues that the quota is needed not only because women make up half the population, but moreover because they have different needs, for example better protection for women workers of their reproductive rights: "If there are no women in the DPR [Indonesian parliament] then how can they change the law?"[45] Ani Soetjipto from CETRO (Centre for Electoral Reform) voices the expectation that "with [the quota] we can fight for a better life for women" (*Kompas* 28 April 2003:36). Elsewhere Soetjipto states that, although "the number of women being more than half of the population is the most legitimate criteria for equal gender representation" (2000:449), her emphasis is actually on the importance of women's participation and representation for the realisation of meaningful politics in Indonesia.

Similarly, Maria Ulfah Anshor (until 2004 head of the Nahdlatul Ulama's women's wing Fatayat) states her hope that the quota can lead to a decrease in policies and legislation that are gender biased (*Kompas* 24 February 2003:36). The belief that women can make a difference to politics because of their gender interests and their different characteristics is also reflected in findings of an 2003 Asia Foundation electoral survey: almost half of those respondents who preferred a female over a male representative in the parliament (only 13 per cent of the total sample) did so because women were considered better suited for certain issues, more responsive to needs of society, more ethical or more responsible (Asia Foundation 2003:140).[46]

These views are parallel to Jonasdottir's (1988) argument in defence of representation of women's interests, namely that women's interests emerge from different experiences and activities in life than men's. Many Indonesian women activists thus claim a voice based on the 'content' aspect of participation. The belief that gender interests and needs are more meaningful for women than are their common experiences with men based on identities other than gender becomes an entry-point for women's claim for representation in decision-making. In contrast, Chapter Six showed that Thai women workers recognise gender interests but act more commonly on their identity as workers. Such allusions to gender interests and identity as outweighing other bases of interest and identity pose the risk of Indonesian women leaders being associated exclusively with women's and family issues.[47] However, few of the women politicians or women workers who wanted recognition *as women* (according to their statements in my interviews or newspaper articles) voiced worries that women would be pigeon-holed in such ways.[48]

A quota system for women in trade unions?

Women workers' predominantly positive reception of the women's quota in political parties begs the question of the possibility or desirability of a similar quota in trade unions. If women indeed have different needs that cannot or should not be represented by men, then would women workers not also require a quota in their own organisations? Because of the longstanding fear of further dividing and therefore weakening the labour movement, union women may be uncertain about affirmative action in the form of quotas or even separate organising through women's departments. In addition, as Briskin (1999) has observed in trade unions in developed countries, women's quotas give women a space to experiment and learn the ropes but also heighten the risk of women being perceived as weaker, in need of special assistance, and only concerned about women's issues (see also Enloe 1990 on women home-based workers in Mexico-City). Because of these risks and because of their different views on potential politicisation of gender identity, union women have a variety of opinions on the matter of women's quotas in trade union structures.

Those Indonesian union women who have doubts about the quota in political parties not surprisingly oppose a quota for women in trade unions, let alone the establishment of separate structures for women. For example, Yanti of ABGTeks states in an interview with

me that the ability to represent other people's interests depends on character or disposition rather than being of the same sex. She therefore does not want to establish a separate organisation for women workers, in order to avoid women being seen as a separate group, removed from men. In the same way that she dislikes workers being removed from other social groups, women should be building alliances with many different groups in society.[49] From a different angle, Yuni from the banking sector agrees with the women's quota in political parties though she is not sure that they will make a difference simply because they are women. She strongly believes, however, that women should not form their own trade union structures, because they are still embedded in their trade union, as women and as workers.[50] For these women, gender identity does not need to be politicised in order to mobilise additional women workers into trade unions.

The SBSI, on the other hand, in 2003 established internal quotas of 30 per cent for women in all officer positions, delegations, and decision-making positions, and allocated 20 per cent of the educational budget to women. According to Sulistri, head of its women's department, SBSI women handled men's opposition to the quota by promising in return that all SBSI activities should include at least 30 per cent men.[51] Thus, not just women's but also men's gender identity became politicised. Sofiati, as president of the woodworkers' federation, failed to institute a quota of 30 per cent in her federation as a result of resistance from male leaders. Her federation therefore now relies on appeals by international and regional donors and partners for a balance between male and female participants in meetings, workshops, and study tours: "if male union leaders are not forced from outside, they will never do it on their own."[52]

On a more individual level, many union women are uncertain whether to privilege gender or worker identity in their own lives and what that means for the fight for gender equality in their unions. When I asked her about a quota for women in unions, Umi from the garment and textile sector perceived a dilemma between wanting special treatment and mobilising women workers based on their gender interests but not wanting to be seen as exclusive or separate from male workers. Irma, a nurse with the FARKES health and pharmaceutical union federation, recounts a similar dilemma. She wants to be treated equally to men, does not want to call unnecessary attention to her femaleness, but also acknowledges that her household responsibilities (which she does not want to change) will inevitably impact on

her workplace role and performance.[53] The question for these women thus becomes how to balance two meaningful identities around which they mobilise.

Some women workers, however, favour not only a quota but even a separate structure for women. For example, Vera and Haryati from the metalworkers' federation in my interview with them, spontaneously mentioned their hope that women would one day join a separate women's union. Such a union would present a more unified response to women's issues and increase women's strength. They believe that a women's union would have to start from a basic agreement on common issues, with members free to pursue their own individual issues beyond that. In essence, their dream is akin to Mohanty's (1997) conception of a women's movement made up of individuals and groups with diverse allegiances who come together based on a common understanding of the gendered structures in which they live. This in turn reflects Young's idea of group membership in which gender attributes constitute members' identity and are the basis for their collective activism. Because not all women respond to such politicisation of the gender structures in which union women work, realisation of their dream is unlikely in the short-term in Indonesia, though the seeds have been sown through the establishment of women workers' organisations.

Such views confirm the appeal and importance of perceptions of gender identity in decisions about organisational structure. The debate on women's quotas and separate structures points to broader issues in the women workers' movement, which are similarly felt in the mainstream women's movement. To what extent can women appeal to a politicised gender identity in order to create solidarity? When does this (perhaps unconscious) strategy benefit women and when is it potentially harmful to their movement? Indonesian union women's use of the discourse of gender interests and gender identity to make claims about representation perhaps arises from the government ideology of '*ibuism*' that emphasised women's role as mother and wife. Perhaps it arises at this particular point in time because women's movements, including organised women workers, have sufficient political space to politicise gender identity. Their organisations have thus succeeded in igniting discussion about women's gender identity, and are starting to challenge (in terms of laws and policies, religious discourse, community traditions, etc.) hegemonic and essentialist notions of women as mothers and wives. By doing so, they show that solidarity

based on gender identity can result in mobilisation and organisation of some Indonesian women workers.

Coalitions and networks

If such dilemmas confront women both in the women's movement and in the labour movement, how much overlap is there between the Indonesian women workers' movement and the mainstream women's movement? As Tarrow (1998) points out, to ensure their continuation, social movements with relatively few members must seek alliances with movement organisations that share similar goals. Do union women have similar perceptions of a politicised gender identity as the women's movement?

Much has been written about the important role played by NGOs in the Indonesian labour movement during the 1990s (Hadiz 1997; Ford 2001). Although trade unions since 1998 have flourished (at least in numbers mobilised for demonstrations), the topic of NGOs still draws mixed reactions from trade union leaders and activists. Similar to Thailand, many union women interviewed for this research criticise NGOs for taking away funding from trade unions, negotiating where they have no power or mandate to do so, not understanding workers' issues, lacking a clear vision, and even setting up their own unions. These findings are confirmed by Hadiz who writes that, although NGOs have offered much help to workers during the 1990s, personal competition between NGO activists creates internal conflict within trade unions and between workers (Sedane 2003:38).

Some union women extend these points of criticism with regard to women's NGOs. For example, Yanti from a textile and garment union federation in Jakarta criticises women's NGOs for not focusing on women workers' issues. Each has their own community, be it housewives, domestic workers, or students, because of class issues.[54] Roma, a student activist formerly with the FNPBI, calls the women's movement (and the organisations that are part of it) somewhat "exclusive."[55] Yuni from the finance sector in Jakarta also laments that few NGOs are concerned with women workers' interests, except for migrant workers.[56] Such criticism overlooks the actual contributions of the women's movement to the struggles of women workers. These union women appear to have little or no contact with women's NGOs such as Yasanti in Yogjakarta and Solidaritas Perempuan in various cities.

Both these NGOs carry out extensive awareness raising, advocacy, and organising work with women workers, though they do not necessarily work with or through trade unions.

Unlike in Thailand, Indonesian women's groups from all walks of life have participated in protest marches and rallies side-by-side with women from offices, factories, and shops. The large-scale protests against increases in the cost of basic household items such as cooking oil and milk provide a compelling example of this solidarity between women. The first such protest was initiated in February 1998 by the aforementioned Jakarta-based Voice of Concerned Mothers (SIP). Although the group's leaders were mostly middle-class women, they focused attention on women's role as mothers of small children who needed sufficient nutrition. Their framing of the cost of living issue was such that they generally received warm support from women workers who could identify with the plight of urban housewives.

This form of social protest was repeated in early 2003 when the government announced a series of price hikes concerning household cooking oil, and electricity and telephone rates. When thousands of Jakarta women took to the streets during the first week of 2003, groups of women factory workers (organised by their union) marched alongside a women's group from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a neighbourhood group of mothers with small children (based on participant observation). Thus, as much as union women distrust and criticise NGOs and the Indonesian women's movement in general, they do at times find common ground with groups of women from different backgrounds than their own. This intermittent collaboration shows that a common gender identity and gender interests exist, but in each case need to be activated in order to bring union women together with other groups of women.[57]

Violence against women is one issue that motivates diverse groups of women to act on their gender identity. For example, Yasanti, an NGO working with women workers in Yogjakarta, attempts to introduce women workers in its discussion groups to other women's organisations in the area, for example to Rifka Annisa, the women's crisis center that handles violence against women, including sexual harassment. Also, on the occasion of International Women's Day in 2003, Yasanti collaborated with other women's organisations, selecting polygamy and violence against women as their main issues of

focus.[58] The women's movement in Yogjakarta agreed on these issues in consultation with union women, ensuring that violence against women was defined in its widest possible meaning. Thus, violence against women incorporated issues of low wages and bad working conditions such as long working hours, and was not confined to women workers. Similarly, Masruchah who (at the time of my interview with her) headed the Yogjakarta chapter of the Indonesian Women's Coalition wants to see the term 'workers issues' broadened to include informal, domestic, and migrant women workers.[59] Women's activists and organisations therefore try to point out the overlap between gender and workers' interests. Such efforts stimulate union women to find common purpose and build solidarity with women across socio-economic and educational divides.

The collaboration between various women's and women workers' organisations for International Women's Day in 2003 points to the existence of some commonalities between these women. Yet, several women union leaders did not participate because they saw the event as being too scattered in its focus. For example, the head of the women's department of ASPEK, a large banking, finance and service sector union, argued:

> If there are too many issues, which issue should receive priority? Because of the low level of awareness at the factory level, activities such as this long march should concentrate on basic issues. The majority only follows out of solidarity, not because they understand the issues.[60]

This example shows clearly the danger of assuming that common action across the women's movement means understanding of a common purpose.

Furthermore, there are significant barriers between union women from different types of workplaces (such as factory and office) and different economic sectors (manufacturing versus finance). When asked if her federation collaborates with ASPEK, the finance and banking sector federation, Arum, a full-time organiser with SPSI-Reformasi blames the different work environments for the lack of collaboration between factory and office workers:

> In the banking sector, it is difficult to get women to get together, because they are more individually minded, whereas in the factories [there is more solidarity because] there is more communication between workers because of their work environment.[61]

Yuni from ASPEK's women's department in Jakarta agrees that organising finance workers is difficult because they are in a 'comfort zone,' feeling safe from the economic developments and being relatively secure in their tenure.[62] Somewhat differently, Siti, an administrative worker in a shipping company until dismissed because she complained of sexual harassment, believes that office workers shy away from unions because they associate unions with factory workers and believe themselves to be "a step above this, of a different class."[63] In short, even though they might want to act upon a common gender identity, many union women from manufacturing and office workplaces face difficulties in overcoming class differences and anti-union prejudice.[64]

In conclusion, Indonesian union women at times join with the mainstream women's movement when their gender interests coincide. Although the existence of feelings of shared gender interests and a shared gender identity provides a useful starting point, the above examples show that women generally act on these interests and this identity when triggered by outside (usually political) developments. However, sustaining such collective mobilisation is more difficult. Class-based differences between types of workplaces can create feelings of distrust that prevent solidarity from being activated into collective mobilisation. Nevertheless, the union women interviewed for this research show that they attempt to mobilise women workers by making their identity both as women and as workers meaningful. Depending on the circumstances, this can elicit feelings of common purpose with other social movements or organisations and can thus broaden and strengthen women workers' collective action.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced contemporary efforts by women workers' groups to mobilise Indonesian urban women workers into unions and other workers' organisations. Based on examples of union women's activism, it argued that many union women recognise their gender interests (practical or strategic, or both) as well as the interests as workers that they have in common with men. As in Thailand, workers' and women's issues are clearly intertwined. Indonesian union women, however, perceive a stronger common identity as women compared with Thai women workers. This gender identity derives from New Order ideology that attempted to define women through their roles as mothers and wives. Thus,

when mobilising women workers to engage in collective action, many union women recognise the importance of making both gender identity and workers' identity meaningful for collective action. They do so by introducing from the start issues relating directly to women workers' experiences as women and as workers. Such experiences are a primary means to stimulate women workers to think about solidarity and a common purpose, whether between industrial women workers or with other groups of women.

If we accept that women workers' movements are embedded in diverse cultural, economic, and political structures and gender regimes at local, national and global levels, it is not surprising that union women turn to these structures and regimes to justify their calls for recognition and representation in trade unions. Like their Thai counterparts, Indonesian union women grapple with the tensions between recognising gender differences and wanting to be treated as equal to men. They therefore frame their issues as both gender and workers' issues. But unlike Thai union women, who tend to speak of their common interests as workers and their contributions to the mainstream labour movement, Indonesian union women frequently assert their gender identity (and gender difference) to claim a presence.

Building solidarity and common purpose among women workers is done through emphasising that women's gender needs and interests cannot be represented by men, making it vital for women to gain a seat in trade union leadership at all levels. In general, union women support quotas for women in political parties because women are perceived to share with each other particular gender needs and interests, regardless of the class, regional, and other differences among women. The importance of gender identity for these women workers justifies their organisations being called part of a new social movement.

My fieldwork findings point to the active politicisation of gender identity and of women's gendered experiences, which is used to invoke women as a group with chosen membership rather than as a 'serial collective.' Indonesian women workers interviewed for this research thus believe in a common womanhood that has significance beyond conditioning their actions and that defines their sense of being and the basis on which they are willing to engage in collective action. At the local level but also increasingly in the national Indonesian context, this sense of collective gender identity has enabled the emergence of

intermittent "coalition politics" (Young 1995:123) between union women and other women across barriers of class.

[1] This informal survey consisted of 25 questions concerning personal background, trade union experience, opinion about women's rights and roles, and opinion about the roles and priorities of trade unions. Of the 200 participants at the second Forum conference in Puncak who received the questionnaire, 64 returned it fully answered.

[2] Because it is funded mainly by ACILS, some union women view the Forum with suspicion. For example, one textile union leader has not joined the Forum because she believes the work and vision of ACILS do not reflect her political priorities. The organisation's linkages with the American political establishment worry her: "ACILS just represents the interests of America ... it is a tool for the Americans to control the labour movement in Indonesia and to keep the trade unions within a small circle that they cannot break out of" (personal interview Emilia Yanti, Jakarta 11 March 2003). ACILS is the international arm of the American trade union federation AFL-CIO which until recently saw the relocation of jobs overseas as the biggest threat to the American labour movement. It is therefore conceivable that the AFL-CIO aimed to protect American jobs through raising labour costs in developing countries rather than to empower workers in Indonesia for a sustainable future. La Botz (2001) notes, however, that globalisation of trade and labour has led the AFL-CIO to reconsider its role in the world and attempt to build genuine partnerships with trade unions overseas.

[3] Personal interviews Diana Rieveira (Vera), Jakarta, 6 January 2003 and 27 August 2003.

[4] Personal interview Umi Akhiroh, Yogjakarta, 4 August 2003.

[5] Personal interview Dian and Ria (not real names), Unggaran, 31 January 2004.

[6] Personal interview Sulistri, Jakarta, 27 August 2003.

[7] Personal interview Parto, Jakarta, 24 October 2002.

[8] Personal interview Dian and Ria (not real names), Unggaran, 31 January 2004.

[9] It is worthwhile to point out here that the gender issues that Saptari expects Javanese women workers to raise include equal wages and sexual harassment. These issues during the late 1980s were not yet successfully addressed by trade unions or workers' groups even in most industrialised countries, although they were certainly on the agenda of women's movements. This makes it all the more surprising that Saptari does not refer to the absence of a feminist or progressive women's movement in Indonesia (or its relative distance from rural areas) as one reason why gender issues were not raised by this particular group of women workers.

[10] Personal interview Hendro Agung Wibowo, Semarang, 29 January 2004.

[11] Personal interviews with Ati (not real name), Jakarta (Bekasi), 18 May 2003 and 29 June 2003, and group interview with Ati and nine members of the women's group, 7 March 2003.

[12] Sunindyo lists the aims of the Dharma Wanita as follows: "To strengthen national unity, to secure the loyalty of government employees, to increase political stability, to concentrate all the energy of the civil service on assisting the economic development plan, and to encourage the wives of the government employees to support their husbands' careers and responsibilities. Other goals of this organization formulated by the New Order government included: giving guidance in promoting and strengthening women's consciousness and responsibility toward the nation, promoting the channeling of 'sisterly' sentiments under one national banner, mobilizing all wives' organizations in the direction of service to the nation" (1996:124 ftn 14).

[13] Personal interview Ida Budiarti, Semarang, 1 February 2004

[14] Personal interview Dian and Ria (not real names), Unggaran, 31 January 2004.

[15] KPAP members consider Indonesian managers and supervisors to be marginally better and easier to get along with than those from Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea who maintain a strict hierarchy and are said to be often involved in sexual harassment (personal interview Hendro Agung Wibowo, Semarang, 29 January 2004 and personal interview Dian and Ria (not real names), Unggaran, 31 January 2004). This contrasts with views that women workers might be better off working for multinational companies than in national (and especially family-owned) businesses (Lim 1990). The potential differences in mobilisation and organisation between internationally and nationally managed and/or owned workplaces require further research.

[16] For a useful introduction to empowerment and participation, see for example Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002).

[17] KPAP leaders encourage group members to translate this new self-awareness into more effective trade unionism. Most KPAP members are also members of whatever trade union exists in their factory, but these are usually so-called 'yellow unions' that have been set up by the management and are not particularly committed to defending workers' rights. Yet, each member is expected to use her new knowledge to try to represent workers' issues in her union and fight for better treatment of women workers. Thus, rather than individual empowerment, the group aims for improvement in the representation of women's interests in and through trade unions in Unggaran.

[18] Similarly, Amin Muftiyanah from Yasanti points out that women workers need to be aware that workers' issues are not just about workers but also about domestic work, fees for housing, and the village or neighbourhood community: "As workers, they work only some hours, but most of their time they spend in the community. Their issues are more complex than those of other women" (personal interview, Yogjakarta, 1 August 2003).

[19] The presence since the early 1930s of women workers in the cigarette industry in East Java is an important exception, as noted by Saptari (1995).

[20] Personal interview Sofiati Mukadi, Jakarta, 11 March 2003.

[21] Personal interviews Diana Rieveira (Vera) and Haryati, Jakarta, 20 January 2003.

[22] This aspect of the labour law is a legacy from colonial days, when Dutch legislation granted menstruation leave for female plantation workers. Menstruation leave was again advocated by (amongst others) GERWANI activists who succeeded in including it in Indonesia's labour legislation soon after the nation's independence.

[23] The issue of menstruation leave was also raised during May Day celebrations in 2003, organised by the Coalition of Indonesian Women (KPI).

[24] Personal interviews Nori Andriyani, Jakarta, 3 October 2003 and Myra Diarsi, Jakarta, 29 October 2002.

[25] Personal interview Nori Andriyani, Jakarta, 3 October 2003. This view coincides with that of Indonesian playwright Ratna Sarumpaet who wrote a play about Marsinah and commented that "the way Marsinah was treated, her raped and mutilated body simply discarded in a forest, symbolised the deep, trivialising contempt which men, especially powerful men, feel towards women who dare to speak out" (quoted in Robinson 2000:152).

[26] Personal interview Umi Akhiroh, Yogjakarta, 1 August 2003.

[27] Personal interview Arum, Jakarta (Depok), 2 October 2002.

[28] Group discussion at Ati's factory, Jakarta (Bekasi), 16 March 2003.

[29] Personal interview Ati, Jakarta (Bekasi), 18 January 2004. Unfortunately, by mid-2004 the factory's management had failed to implement many of these provisions, even though they had been included in the collective bargaining agreement signed between company management and union leadership. Ati has subsequently been fired from her job in what appears to be a case of unfair dismissal because of union activities.

[30] Bianpoen's (2000a) analysis of the re-emergence of women's mobilisation in 1998 also shows that women in Jakarta quickly moved beyond economic grievances to engage in much more political mobilisation and awareness raising as a result of the large-scale violence against women of Chinese descent in May 1998. The government's denial and refusal to allow independent investigations prompted increased awareness of and action concerning violence against women (Robinson 2000). The upsurge in women's activism and mobilisation also resulted in women activists organising the second women's congress in Yogjakarta in December 1998 and establishing the Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy (KPI) with the objective to unite women from all walks of life.

[31] Personal interview Nori Andriyani, Jakarta, 3 October 2003.

[32] Personal interview Wachyuni Mustani, Jakarta, 10 March 2003.

[33] Personal interview Sofiati Mukadi, Jakarta, 11 March 2003.

[34] Personal interview Umi Akhiroh, Yogjakarta, 4 August 2003.

[35] Personal interview Ester Tuange, Jakarta, 10 October 2003.

[36] Personal interview Sulistri, Jakarta, 27 August 2003.

[37] Although the story is difficult to verify, the Forum of Women Leaders and Activists seems to have protested in late 2002 against proposals by the new Confederation of Indonesian Trade Unions (KSPI) to ban night work for all women in the new Labour Code under discussion at that time. The Forum argued that all women except for pregnant women should be allowed to undertake nightwork in order to increase their wages. The KSPI in response to this argument demanded that the new Labour Code include a clause requiring women to ask permission from their husbands before being allowed to take up night work. The Forum immediately rejected this demand, and it has not been taken up in the 2003 Labour Code. Several of the women who negotiated on behalf of the Forum have told me that they felt as if they were bargaining with their employers while discussing these and other women's issues with the KSPI.

[38] Personal interview Amin Muftiyanah, Yogjakarta, 1 August 2003.

[39] The quota legalised through election legislation (Law 12/2003 Article 65 Subsection 1) specifies that "each political party that participates in the elections may propose candidates for the national, local, provincial and district parliaments for each area of election, giving attention to minimally 30 per cent representation of women." The inclusion of the word 'may' has given rise to widespread criticism from women's activists and

women's NGOs that the quota is only voluntary, and the law does not specify sanctions against parties that do not meet the quota. For a good background on women in political parties, see Francisia Seda (2002).

[40] Personal interview Emilia Yanti, Jakarta (Depok), 11 March 2003.

[41] Personal interview Diana Rieveira (Vera), Jakarta, 27 August 2003.

[42] In practice, this has not been the main obstacle according to women's activists, women politicians or candidates, and involved NGOs. All agree that the main difficulty has been the lack of willingness of political parties to place women candidates sufficiently high on their electoral lists that they stand a chance of being elected. Furthermore, many women candidates are shifted to lower places because of their inability to meet their party's demands for financial support of the campaign. Lastly, only those political parties with women's divisions or aligned with large social or religious movements have made serious efforts to search for qualified candidates (Ani Soetjipto from CETRO during September 2003 Forum conference, and various reports from Kompas and Media Indonesia newspapers).

[43] Personal interview Wachyuni Mustani, Jakarta, 10 March 2003.

[44] Personal interview Masruchah, Yogjakarta, 1 August 2003.

[45] Personal interview Ida Budiarti, Semarang, 1 February 2004.

[46] The remainder of the sample gave as reasons for preferring women in parliament: to give a voice to women (37 per cent) and for women's equality (28 per cent). Because these answers are open to interpretation, they are not linked here to either the form or the content argument for women's representation.

[47] For example, by religious-based political parties; see for example comments by the head of the Islamic Prosperous Welfare Party (PKS) who recognises the need for women's representation in parliament because "the country faces many problems related to women, children and the institution of the family" in an Islamic-oriented national newspaper (*Republika* 23 December 2003).

[48] An opinion poll by *Kompas* newspaper in February 2003 found that among the 954 (presumably highly educated) respondents, 64 per cent of women and 67 per cent of men believed that current women parliamentarians were not representing the interests of fellow women (perhaps believing that they should do so), while 70 per cent of the total believed that women's voices would receive more attention if more women were elected to the parliament (*Kompas* 24 February 2003:8). These findings indicate that certain segments of the population express ample support for women legislative candidates, based on the hope that they would better represent women's needs and interests than the current parliamentarians.

[49] Personal interview Emelia Yanti, Jakarta (Depok), 11 March 2003.

[50] Personal interview Wachyuni Mustani, Jakarta, 10 March 2003.

[51] Personal interview Sulistri, Jakarta, 27 August 2003.

[52] Personal interview Sofiati Mukadi, Jakarta (Depok), 11 March 2003.

[53] Personal interview Irma (not real name), Jakarta, 13 February 2004.

[54] Personal interview Emelia Yanti, Jakarta (Depok), 11 March 2003.

[55] Personal interview Roma, Jakarta, 28 September 2002.

[56] Personal interview Wachyuni Mustani, Jakarta, 10 March 2003.

[57] Yet, the participation of women from different walks of life does not always result in a lasting women's movement. The case of Indonesia is reminiscent of the Anti Price Rise Movement in Bombay in the 1970s as described by Gandhi: "Horizontal linkages are difficult to establish. There was little time or space for getting to know the women. By and large they walked into the rallies as passive participants. They remember the novelty of the experience, the excitement, and a sense of collective strength. But it was not 'their' movement. The local mobilizers on the other hand had formed strong relations with each other on the basis of a common socio-economic background, involvement in politics, and their common ties with the leaders" (1995:224). Thus, although the protest action in Jakarta grouped together women across socio-economic class and employment sector, perhaps only its leaders felt part of (and ownership in) the movement.

[58] Personal interview Amin Muftiyanah, Yogjakarta, 1 August 2003.

[59] Personal interview Masruchah, Yogjakarta, 4 August 2004.

[60] Personal interview Wachyuni Mustani, Jakarta, 10 March 2003.

[61] Personal interview Arum, Jakarta (Depok), 2 October 2002.

[62] Personal interview Wachyuni Mustani, Jakarta, 10 March 2003.

[63] Personal interview Siti (not real name), Yogjakarta, 1 August 2003.

[64] Yet, there are some small steps towards building relations. Vera from the metalworkers credits the Forum with exposing her to other sectors, acquainting her with women from the office and service sectors, and stimulating greater discussion among women from different backgrounds (personal interview Diana Rieveira (Vera), Jakarta, 27 August 2003).

Conclusion

This thesis has addressed the question of the extent to which identity plays a role in women workers' attempts to mobilise and organise collectively, and if it does, which identities matter. Through its focus on processes of organising, this thesis has in particular analysed efforts at identity construction by small women workers' organisations that have been established in recent years in urban Thailand and Indonesia. The central argument has been that mobilising and organising efforts by women workers are shaped by both gender and economic regimes. Women workers at times demand recognition as workers and at other times as women, emphasising class or gender differences in accordance with their audience, political and economic circumstances, and potential alliances with other movements and organisations.

Case studies of union women in Thailand have shown that even when their protest does not revolve explicitly around gender interests, gender regimes in trade unions and in society and economy more broadly shape the construction of their collective identity. If, however, women workers' claims for recognition and redistribution explicitly raise common gender interests, as they do in Indonesia (though gender interests might very well be a trigger to try to satisfy other, non-gender related needs), their collective mobilising and organising efforts might make strategic use of gender identities. In other words, claims for recognition and redistribution cannot tell us in a straightforward manner if and how women workers act based on a politicised gender identity.

As foreshadowed in Chapters Three to Five, the main factors that appear to account for the differences between these two countries are their dominant gender and economic regimes, including their systems of industrial relations. While both regimes are characterised by an infinite number of variations depending on place and time, I believe we can still speak of 'regimes' because of the pervasive nature of common ideology that is spread through mass communication, educational systems, legal systems, and state structures. Other factors mentioned in Chapter Four, such as religion, age, and locality may also have been influential in shaping the responses of some women workers to the state, their employers and managers, and male trade unionists. My interviews with union women in both countries

strongly suggest, however, that gender and economic regimes are the dominant influences in response to which women workers have mobilised and organised collectively.

Firstly, even when women workers do not mobilise around gender identity and do not make claims regarding gender issues, gender plays an important role in shaping the possibilities and constraints under which they operate and to which they respond. As Smyth and Grijns note, "gender norms define social acceptability of particular forms of resistance" (1997:17). More importantly, ideology and discursive practices significantly influence whether women and men will experience gender as seriality or as group membership.

For example, the New Order state ideology that for decades propagated a common womanhood among Indonesian women differs markedly from the gender regime in Thailand, where patriarchal gender norms are most meaningful and most strongly experienced in conjunction with other forms of hierarchy such as age and class. Women workers in Thailand do not necessarily feel strongly about their gender identity, whereas in Indonesia women workers appear to find gender identity meaningful. In turn, this difference helps explain why many union women in Thailand politicise their workers' identity for collective mobilising, while in Indonesia union women mainly appear to appeal to, and construct, a common gender identity. The difference between these countries is also a reminder that consciousness raising among women workers may vary in its outcomes. Where women workers do not affirm gender or feminist identities, this should not necessarily be taken as a lack of consciousness about women's rights and gender equality (Yuval-Davis 1994).

Secondly, while the industrial relations systems in both countries aimed to achieve the exclusion of labour from state-employer relations, the two countries differed in their methods of achieving this goal. The New Order regime's suppression of independent unionisation in Indonesia through both practical (and often violent) measures and discursive practices rendered politicisation of workers' identity difficult. Before 1998, the legal vulnerability of independent unions and union organisers (as well as the few more genuine (F)SPSI units) also forced many workers (both male and female) to organise under banners other than the trade union movement. Thailand, on the other hand, experienced several periods of genuine freedom of association in recent decades which gave workers

greater opportunity to challenge dominant constructions of worker identity. Struggles by women workers over meanings and exclusions implicit in the term 'worker' currently revolve not only around gender but also around the problem of homeworkers and the unemployed. The legitimacy accorded to trade unionism under Thai laws may also have contributed to shaping an environment in which workers could contest industrial relations policy and practice more broadly.

What broader conclusions can be drawn from this research? Union women in Thailand provide a first hint with their refusal to validate gender identity as the main impetus for mobilising. Although at times they strategically use women's allegedly superior qualities to encourage women to mobilize in groups, these union women make claims for recognition and redistribution not only as women within trade unions but also, and more vocally, as workers in Thai society. Women workers' organisations may therefore be established by women and have women as their members, but this does not automatically make them 'women's organisations', let alone feminist organisations.

Secondly, what collective claims for recognition women make has implications for how outsiders regard women's participation in social movements. Although Castells warns us that "social movements are who they say they are" (1997:69-70), their expressions of collective identity vary with time, place, and audience and are framed accordingly towards potential members, opponents, allies and supporters, observers, and media. Framing is one of the tools at the disposal of a collective movement for attracting support and motivating its members to take action. Reading protest as partially symbolic and shaped by the need to frame issues to attract support (from inside a movement or from other movements or supporters) might lessen confusion and misunderstanding about the seemingly different stages and forms of feminist consciousness among women workers. It cautions against deducing from women workers' forms of protest their level of feminist consciousness and/or their consciousness about strategic gender needs and interests. Instead, protest can be regarded as an expression and an outcome of collective mobilisation, in which framing will frequently be used as a tool to construct a common goal and to strengthen feelings of common identity.

As such, mobilisation may make use of conventional identities that are authorised and constructed through hegemony, such as motherhood, but may alternatively (or even simultaneously) challenge such identities and attempt to replace them or infuse them with new meanings. This may similarly be the case in efforts to establish alliances with other groups and movements. While outsiders may consider them to be women's movements, women workers' groups may reject such labels, regarding their worker identity as more meaningful and more effective for mobilising purposes than their gender identity. White (1999) for example observes a tendency among development practitioners influenced by the Women-in-Development paradigm to group women by sex without having ascertained what shared sense of identity – if any – can motivate those women to act together. She reminds us that "repeated emphasis on the differences of women to men ... fails to question how ideas of the 'general' interest by class or ethnicity may be implicitly male gendered or the way in which these interests are interrelated" (1999:131). Caution is therefore called for when outsiders attempt to interpret the demands and claims made by social movements.

Thirdly, this research affirms the possibility of collective action by women as women that avoids validating essentialist or universalising identities. Young's (1995) conceptualisation of gender as seriality allows us to think of women as passively sharing gender structures that do not necessarily define their individual or group identity. Nor do those structures constitute them as members of a group with common attributes. The Thai union women described in this thesis provide a practical example of gender as seriality. Even though they may have gathered in a women-only organisation, these women workers may not identify themselves primarily as women because they experience their womanhood as 'seriality' rather than as chosen membership in a group defined by common oppression or common discrimination. Indonesian union women, in contrast, experience class as seriality, but want to be recognised as a distinct group of women with equal rights to participation and representation. Women workers put their claims for recognition in both universal and particular terms, and refer at times to gender differences but at other times to class or other differences. They do so in order to challenge the circumstances in which they live these differences, rather than to reaffirm them.

What practical implications does the apparent centrality of identity hold for women workers in developing countries? Identities of gender or work are necessarily partial in that they

unite in action only those women workers for whom that particular politicised identity is meaningful. As Young emphasises, "groupings of women will always be partial in relation to the series ... because a group will have particular objectives or purposes that cannot encompass or even refer to the totality of the condition of women as a series" (1995:123). The same applies to workers, some of whom may unite as women but others by profession, skill, workplace, age, or ethnic origin.

The partial nature of collective identities necessitates the forming of alliances and coalitions with others beyond the group, and hence adjustment or broadening of the identities that motivate collective mobilisation. In Thailand, we observed the growing presence during the 1990s of cross-sectoral alliances on a variety of issues. This was made possible by the alarming weakening of the trade union movement during the 1980s and was encouraged by a broadening of definitions of worker, work, and workplace. This broadening of workers' identity has recently allowed union women to form alliances with home-based workers and unemployed women in communities near industrial areas. Yet, alliances with the mainstream women's movement and its organisations have proved difficult for women workers to initiate, given their strong self-identification as workers and perceptions of discriminatory treatment at the hands of middle- and upper-class Thai women who lead most organisations in the mainstream women's movement.

In Indonesia, union women perceive common gender interests and a common gender identity with the mainstream women's movement. This can be seen from their participation in protest actions organised by self-identified women's organisations as well as in the International Women's Day celebrations. At these occasions, gender interests such as the campaign to combat violence against women and the rising cost of living are defined sufficiently broadly to enable diverse groups of women to unite in protest. Notwithstanding some distrust of NGOs, many union women report collaboration with a number of women's NGOs and some have approached state structures for women, such as the State Ministry for Women's Empowerment, for assistance. There is little evidence, however, of Indonesian union women seeking coalitions with other groups of workers with grievances, such as migrant workers and workers in state-owned enterprises facing privatisation or down-sizing. These case studies show how collective identity shapes the alliances made possible between different groups of women, workers, and women workers.

Recognising the multiplicity of gender identities, the differences between women, and their consequences for alliances for collective action, we may also begin to look to other groups of women to defend the rights of women workers. Gender interests are not unitary and may create divisions among women, as they do in Thailand where middle-class women have an interest in the perpetuation of other women's cheap labour. Alliances between women therefore require not only the politicisation of a common (gender) identity, as occurred in Indonesia where the New Order state ideology circulated discourses of shared gender attributes. These alliances must also be built on an awareness of the situational nature of this common gender identity and of the fact that it is built on the tactical and partial expression of particular goals. Thus, women (workers) may unite as a group across class, race, age, etc when their interests are framed as part of a common response to the gendered structures that they experience in daily life.

It is likely that, as politicised identities for mobilisation become more broadly defined and more inclusive, alliances equally become broader in scope and encompass a greater variety of groups. This may make it easier for women workers to argue for recognition of their equal rights as citizens and for a politics of presence, based on their identity rather than on their (potentially) different needs and interests. Such alliances may, however, also become increasingly ad-hoc and short-term because they are more difficult to sustain, unless new instruments for mobilising and organising become available.

Two types of movements stand out as potential alliance partners for women workers' groups: labour movements and women's movements. As the labour movement is slowly regaining its strength in parts of the world but is in decline in other parts, the potential power of alliances may depend in large part on the directions taken by women's movements and by women politicians who can support such movements in formal political spheres. The opportunities for women's movements to align themselves with women workers clearly require that women's organisations acknowledge the class bias that guided many of their past efforts, and embrace strategies that build up their membership at the grass-roots level in a manner that shows accountability and democratic leadership. In the absence of constructions of common womanhood, whether indigenous or crafted through state ideology, women's organisations can enter into strong and lasting alliances with

women workers if they show themselves to be democratic and open to addressing issues of labour exploitation and challenging dominant economic regimes. In Indonesia, such a re-orientation of women's organisations could build on efforts at grassroots campaigns against economic and sexual exploitation by Gerwani, the mass women's organisation of the 1950s and 1960s. For women's organisations to emulate Gerwani's strategies, however, would likely require the social and political rehabilitation of Gerwani, whose history and legacy are still regarded with suspicion due to its alignment with the Indonesian communist party in the lead-up to the 1965 coup d'etat.

Like elsewhere in industrialising Southeast Asia, economic restructuring in Thailand and Indonesia is gradually changing the nature of production processes, increasing the importance of information and networking across sectors and across borders for both employers and workers alike. Such changes are calling for increasingly multi-layered forms of protest, using a variety of strategies, instruments, and identities, some of which are no longer tied to territorial interests. Although transnational mobilisation of women workers has not been the focus of this thesis, it is important to draw out the similarities in obstacles to local and transnational coalition building. Information has gained in importance as an instrument for workers mobilising and organising protest action (such as consumer boycotts or action to prevent factory relocation), yet access to information is partially subject to forming alliances with other workers' organisations and NGOs, both locally and across borders. The need for timely and accurate information creates a mutual incentive for both women workers' groups and domestic and transnational labour groups to explore alliances. Awareness of, and respect for, the identities around which women workers mobilise and organise in particular locations would help labour movements to build sustainable alliances as equal partners with women workers' groups.

As women workers in Thailand and Indonesia continue to challenge dominant gender and worker identities assigned to them by business and political elites, what are the prospects for their future? Both countries continue to be drawn further into global markets, but new investment frequently is not labour intensive in nature while many manufacturing industries have relocated overseas or are planning to do so. The end, in January 2005, of the Multi-Fibre Accord and its import quotas for textile and garment products from developing countries signals the likely shrinking of this sector in Thailand and Indonesia – unless

government and business make substantial investments to improve productivity and upgrade machinery. These changes will undoubtedly affect union women in both countries, as the largest share of women union members (as well as the most experienced unionists) come from the textile and garment sector. Furthermore, the increasing informalisation of production – from registered factories to home-based, informal workplaces – will see many union women lose their right to union membership, unless national legislation governing unions is changed radically to make unionisation in the informal economy possible. Such macro-economic changes bode ill for union women.

However, union women are learning fast from their own experiences and from other countries and sectors, as communication methods facilitate the spread of information and NGOs and trade union federations increasingly bring women workers together in conferences and workshops. Resistance by male union leaders and members is still widespread and this thesis has demonstrated some of its potential consequences for union women who transgress gender norms through their activism. Greater learning experiences, however, increase union women's awareness of the importance of their group identity not as unitary and exclusive but as subject to revision and as a potential bridge to other groups and movements. Identities are continuously contested and reconstructed. Although these processes most frequently occur in opposition to the state and employers, women workers equally acknowledge their heterogeneity and challenge each other, as they engage in the formation of collective action and, in some cases, social movements.

As the women workers' organisations examined in this thesis try to sustain their activities, they are inevitably faced with difficult questions regarding direction, structure, and funding. If they grow larger in membership over the coming years and if they cannot secure sufficient funding, it is questionable whether they will be able to retain their egalitarian nature while functioning optimally in the face of strong resistance. Yet, this egalitarianism forms one of the major points of attraction for many members, who feel that it enables them to learn and share experiences freely with fellow union women, in contrast to their male-dominated and mostly undemocratic federations. The preference of some of the smaller regional groupings to remain unregistered and informal may also come under pressure, if their membership increases and their prominence grows.

Whether they can remain women-only organisations also requires further investigation. Some members of the Thai Women Workers' Unity Group interpreted the request in 2003 by a man to become a member as an attempt by male union leaders to infiltrate and slowly take over the group. In such instances, increasing attention from male union leaders and attempts at 'sabotage' may indeed be a sign of being taken seriously as competitors (Aspinall 1999). From government ministries and agencies, however, such recognition is still lacking, implying that women workers' struggles for recognition will not become institutionalised any time soon in regular fora such as tripartite labour negotiations. In the short-term, it is more likely that such struggles for recognition will awaken women workers to the possibility of political action, not only on workplace issues but also in other areas of their lives. Their main challenge remains to stimulate other women, whether workers or not, to transform their individual and spontaneous protest into sustained collective action that has the potential to become a social movement in the longer-term.

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